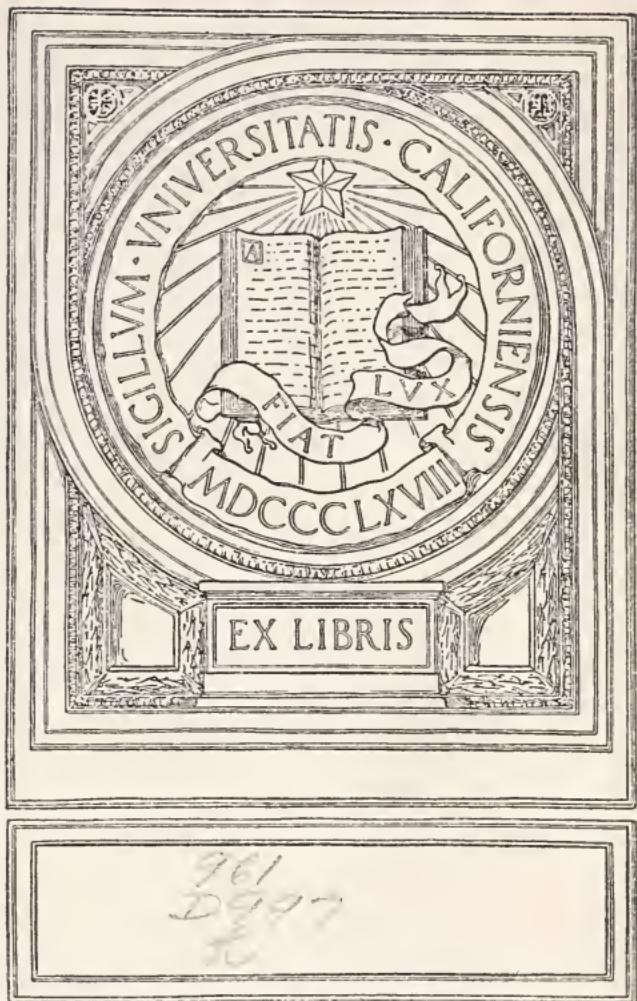


The
HUNTER

WATSON DYKE





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THE HUNTER

BY

WATSON DYKE
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THE
HUNTER

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BY

WATSON DYKE

THE
MILITARY
ADVENTURES

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

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THE HUNTER

CHAPTER I

THE HUNTER AND SILVIA

LOUIS BUTTRESS was the nobody of Alamanca Creek. Whatever his worth might be, it was best known to himself; and he, from his own mouth, described his family as "people of no account," who had lived in the Midland counties of England, and who had left their native place in a dire state of penury.

Everybody believed Louis when he said that his mother and father could not read or write. Some said that Louis was not much better; but he never gave them any opportunity of proving their belief.

He was described best by his own terse remark: "I'm a natural sort o' man." He lived near the

water in an excuse for a cabin, which had cost about a dollar in the making, and he spent his whole life with the dumb creation. Money-making had no pleasure for him at all; but the eyes of a coon, a fox, a ground-hog, or a mouse, had power to arrest the whole man.

Louis Buttress was the poorest and the happiest creature in Alamanca Creek. He was not very clean in his person, but his mouth opened to words which held no poison.

He was despised and considered as beneath notice; and the mildness with which he received this disapproval was thought to be his assent. He was not good-looking, excepting for the great advantage that must be granted to the healthy. He was healthy; and his sea-blue eyes, very observant and roving, set off a dull face and a dull form.

He slouched, he scrambled, he sprawled, he ran, he limped, he climbed, in the search after animals. He never went into the small towns that were within the boundary of his hut. City life appeared to upset him, as sea upsets the land lubber. He

got a good natured neighbour to do his errands for him, and repaid the deed with some item from the natural world.

Silvia Lake was the beauty of Alamanca Creek; and her father, Sylvester Lake, had endless callers at their home on Creek Point. He took the honour to himself, being an important feeling man; but Silvia, whose mother was dead, had reason to know that she was the star for pony-riding boys to dream of.

She was as slender as beauty can be, without losing power; and she had a sense of propriety that beat away the rascals without any fuss. There were men with tall banking accounts who haunted Alamanca Creek; but it was easy to see that Silvia valued men for their less visible qualities.

Such adventures as the winning of woman were beyond Louis Buttress. He was "carved out for the dumb creation," which are his own words again. The vanity, the folly, the deceit, the excesses, which lessen humanity, were outside his experience; and he had no thoughts to understand them.

The Hunter

Now in hunting, a man learns a lore which is kept out of school books, and Louis had gone deep in this one vein. Where he went nobody really knew, and few would have cared to follow him. He was so thoroughly at home in the brush that he shared the sympathy of the dumb creation. As a part of the wood life, he understood cunning observations of any outsider.

Buttress delighted in the wild and had a sense of "the game" in his fights with the animal world. Many a creature went off scot-free because a plucky fight had won him another chance.

When this tale opens, Silvester Lake's fortunes were at a low ebb. A rapid consumption had taken hold of him; but his spirits were rampant and he would not believe in his illness. Silvia was debating the problem of life on her own account. Bill Din, a champion pony rider, fascinated her with his manliness and power; while Jack Sheridan, an Englishman, had tales of adventure by land and sea. "Spen," a sly youth who was ready to use deceit to win her, had no power what-

ever, beyond that of an old neighbour, who may find a good opportunity in the fact of a life-long intimacy. Louis knew nothing of all this. Spen told him of it in rambling tales sometimes; but why should Louis remember it? When a man is making a fly that is to take a wily fish, can he grasp the futile tales of human creatures?

"A lot of madness among you humans," he would say as his fingers contrived the small snare.

Spen one day was worse than usual. He found Louis preparing for a shooting expedition; and thought he would relieve the tedium of the process by giving the half-witted creature an account of mankind's doings. So he began.

"Darn it! You have the best of it in this rat hole by the Creek. The devil's loose in Alamanca, anyway! Talk of marriage! There ain't a bit of decency from one end of the ridge to the other—the married are worse than the single. Half the kids ain't aware of their parents. That's truth, Louis!"

Louis looked at him blankly and said, after a suitable pause: "Throw that knife over!"

"Ain't you glad you're out of this human muddle? The Spenloves are gone. Biddy's off with that red-haired man at the store, and the man's taken that girl of Henderson's. What do you think of it?"

"There's nothing in it," said Louis.

"Man, what are you dreaming of?" said Spen.
"Every word's true. That kid of the Jumper family down to—"

"Bite that string, while I cut."

"You're a darned madman: and your eyes is drilled holes that see nothin'."

"Wal, that's all I got to say. I ain't able to follow you."

"Good-bye," said Spen. "Say, have you ever seen Silvia Lake?"

"Don't know," said Louis.

"She's a beautiful kid. I'd like to marry her, Louis. But she's proud, darned proud. Wal, good-bye!" And Spen was gone.

With a smile of glee, Louis prepared to go out to the woods, snatched up his gun, and made for a quarter where he hoped to secure some wild fowl.

It was a fine afternoon in late August. The hunter's eyes had a passionate joy in them, as he threaded his way through the brush. There was a small pond, not far away, the north side of it belonging to Sylvester Lake, hidden in birch and hickory; and the south, where Louis was crawling, considered impassable, being mostly a quicksand of mud and slush, in which Buttress had once lost two good milk cows. Such terrible deaths had frightened everybody; and there was not a man and a gun supposed to venture amongst the willows and milkweeds; but Louis found his way, willy nilly. He had learned many a trick taught by a fox or a coon, and he loved this bit of untouchable ground. Everyone wondered where he got some of his specimens; but nobody knew that Ari-wa-kis pond, on its impassable south side, saw as much of him as of foxes and birds. But shooting was not

done at this end of the lake, as Buttress wished for silence and secrecy.

To-day, for once, he had his gun. He wanted a wild fowl. He was sure of it here; and all the neighbours had gone to Alamanca to a big fair.

Creeping along in the quiet afternoon light, he adventured a bunch of wild geese, not very far away. Louis lowered himself and watched intently.

Where he lay, he could see the glint of the water in a saffron light, which poured from the sky all the more deeply, because there was a bank of purple cloud below the setting sun. Here the geese, looking clean and beautiful, folding and unfolding their white wings, talked to one another.

Restless in movement, they were yet very peaceful and easy. Close about Buttress were the birches and hickories, waving in a small wind, and there was the rattling of the milkweed seeds in their pods. There was some seeded grass waving too, and something feathery to the left of him. Without moving his body Buttress allowed his eyes to

turn aside, prepared for more adventure. The feathery something was the tail of a fox, who was after the same game as himself; and the waving of the tail was a piece of splendid trickery—merely the fox's imitation of growing plants and moving leaves.

Buttress's eyes met those of the fox, and there was a moment of intense excitement. Then the animal recognized a friendly sportsman, understood everything, and continued the hunt with the hunter.

Buttress felt his respect leap up in a flame. They were allies. It was so entertaining that his thoughts wavered from the geese.

Suddenly the geese flew away in wild excitement; and Buttress knew that the fox was as surprised as himself. The animal made a graceful leap forward, and then went like the wind. There was now a splash in the water, and the man searched its surface for the disturbing influence.

He laid down his gun.

Someone had swum in and was now swimming out. It was so full of interest to Louis that he rose to his full height, ran rather recklessly through the brush, and came out on the edge of the little lake.

Shining pools caught the evening light, glittering amidst the brush; and not far away, at the extreme limit of Silvester Lake's property, he saw an emerging dripping figure.

He had hunted out everything that could be hunted in this region, but this was the first time he had found his own kind. She was standing perfectly motionless, looking towards the evening light. The instinct to observe was his very life, so Buttress was aware at once that she had not seen him, and was enjoying the air bath; and he exclaimed in delight:

"My God! Ain't that just right! Plumb as the Almighty planned her!"

A water hen, disturbed by his intruding and unguarded feet, called loudly, and went into the lake. The girl looked in that direction and her

eyes met the man's, just as the fox's eyes had done it, a minute ago.

Then Louis watched and saw two small hands draw together on the girl's breast. He knew what that meant, because he had seen actions with similar meanings when in the wilds; and then she stopped the frenzied gesture and her eyes reached him with their force, and she gave him her whole attention. Buttress put it in one word, "trust."

"Great God in Heaven! She's clothed from my poor eyes by that faith of hers," he said. He waved his hand to her and disappeared amongst the brush.

"Now there's the difference between the knowing and the unknowing," said Buttress excitedly; "the beasts would feel clothed, not having understood the fall; but the woman knew; yet rose above it. 'Tis true, I saw nothing but her beautiful soul, after that first look, when she was unknown of my presence."

He needed all his attention to get out of the

morass in safety. This done he clambered through an oak grove, full of thought.

"If that ain't a curious coincidence! Here comes Spen in the afternoon, with those darned tales of darkness, and out I went to get something clean into my brain and heart. Here is the Almighty puttin' it into the soul of that woman, to bathe in my presence—that's to tell Louis Butress that everything's just all right, same as it ought to be. That's enough for me."

CHAPTER II

THE FUNERAL

BUTTRESS went home with no fowl that night, so he took the great household resource for his supper, and fell back upon a dish of corn mush.

It was very good. The simplest food can be delicious after hours in the brush.

Spen called in about nine o'clock, and sat for a quarter of an hour without a word. Louis was wondering if he were ill, when the news came out—Silvester Lake had broken a blood-vessel and was dying.

"They say," said Spen, "that the dough's all done in that quarter. The kid's defenceless—not a dollar behind her. It's a mighty shame."

Louis was cobbling an old shoe, and failed to realize the importance of the news.

"The place will be sold up. Those two mean brutes who shove themselves into the house on every occasion—I suppose they'll git in every day. Of the two, I'd prefer Sheridan, but I ain't gotten a chance someway. If the old man departs, some-thin' 'll happen quick. The kid can't stay here, unless she marries one of us."

"Sure she can!" said Louis, dropping the shoe. "What good has she gotten from her father? He ain't done nothin' but live there for himself. If she did before, she can do now, sure!"

"Ever seen her?" inquired Spen.

"Not that I know of," said Louis.

"There again," said Spen, "not that you know of? Who but you in all the country would have a doubt about it! Once seen, ever remembered—that's what the boys think round here. You must have seen 'er, only beauty don't hold you, no more than dollars."

"I remember some things," said Louis. "I know I've seen her father. I saw him beating a dog, and I tol' him of it."

"I bet you did, and you ain't ever liked him since."

"Can't say I have—an unnatural sort of man," said Louis.

"Not as unnatural as you," said Spen, taking himself off the table, and going as quickly as he had come.

It was three days later when Spen called again; and the good suit he wore, his grave face, and the overpowering air of importance he brought into the shanty, told his errand to Louis.

"Silvester's gone?" inquired the hunter, who was washing a shirt, in a tub half filled with soap and water.

"Slid off the globe," said Spen. "You're asked to the funeral on Monday. Eleven o'clock at the house, there'll be a sermon by the Rev. William Elder, and then the man's virtues will be rolled off, while his sins will be mangled in the washing machine of the Church. You're lucky, you ain't never attended a funeral, have you?"

"I'll attend this one," said Louis. "Seein' they're my neighbours. I'll kinder show myself at the last minute. Not inside the door, nothin' uncomfortable, but in respect to the silent peace there's been on both sides. I owe the family a duty; and barring the dog-beating, there's never been anythin' but peace between the Lakes and me."

"Miss Lake made the list out," said Spen. "My! She's gone thin and white, and prouder than a queen. She said to me, 'You'll go to Buttress,' and I said, 'I'll do so'—I didn't like to tell her you was death on funerals, for fear the kid took it personal; and she turned away, and again she looked back,—'You'll tell Buttress,' she said, 'he's been a good neighbour,' she said, kinder sorrowful."

"What? She did?" inquired Louis, dropping the shirt back into the suds.

"She did—I bet she's seen you rollin' about in the grass, playin' those huntin' games of yours. 'Good neighbour' was what she said, and it sur-

prised me. That shirt'll do; get it out while there's some sun to dry it."

"Ain't it a good thing he's died while I'm having a washing day?" said Louis. "I wash every season that comes in, it keeps it in my mind. Now I'll have a clean shirt to go in; but I'll stick at the back of the crowd where no one can see me so, you can say afterwards accidental to Miss Lake: 'Buttress was there, I seen him on the edge of the crowd!'"

"My! You self-important beggar! She'll never think of it again."

"Seein' she asked twice about it, she might think of me. Remember, I'm there, Spen, whether you see me or not—I'm on the edge of the crowd, but I'm there."

Monday was a wretched day, beginning with clouds and mist, and pouring with rain before eleven. Buttress did little else but prepare for his first funeral; and what with washing and wriggling into a better suit, he felt unhappy and ill.

"There ain't a dumb creature would know me

this mornin', " he said. " I believe I'll scare the dog."

And Testy, the faithful follower of his adventures, acted like one ashamed, sniffed about his master, and whined in a fit of misery.

"It ain't for long," said Louis. "This poor Lake has gone out, and for the sake of his lady daughter we're dressin' ourselves up like a figure-head; but presently the show will be through, and back I'll come running; and we'll go huntin', to get it out of our minds and thoughts."

The dog, looking better satisfied, retired to the shed behind the shanty.

Louis's habit of avoiding crowds made it difficult to move towards one; yet in obedience to the invitation, he found himself on the hill, and not far from Lake's south verandah.

There he stood on the edge of the crowd, a tall weary-looking figure, with flapping black coat, and an almost terrified expression.

Suddenly he saw Catherine Talbot moving about among the crowd of men. She was the busy

woman of the neighbourhood, having to run the domestic machinery of the funerals, weddings, and births in Alamanca Creek.

"Guess I'll go," said Louis to himself, "I've been seen at the funeral—that's all they'll need from me."

But before he could retire behind a big double buggy, whose sheltering blackness appeared a haven in a wilderness, Catherine Talbot had espied him. She immediately came up to him.

"So it's you, Louis. Come to a funeral at last. That's good. Now *you* think about death a bit—it ain't goin' to leave *you* out."

"Death and me had it out in my teens," said Louis; "'twas an old grizzly did the job, and I sure thank him."

"Wal, you come and look at the dead man. He's beautiful."

"I ain't agoin' to do it. If I couldn't visit Silvester Lake in life, I ain't agoin' to thrust myself before him in death."

"The Minister's there, and you'll hear the

sermon. It's writ out on seven sheets of paper, but to be said off by rote."

"I ain't goin' a step nearer than where I am," said Louis; "there, ma'am, that's all there is to it!"

"Louis, you're a heathen!" said Catherine Talbot.

"Right, ma'am. Don't mind the title a bit!" said Louis.

"And so is Miss Lake, sure thing!" said Catherine, as she hurried back to the verandah. "She's nearly as bad as Louis. I ain't able to get over the fact that she's lettin' all these men run her affairs. There's Sheridan amongst the papers; Bill Din actin' up to the neighbours; and that idle Spen taking authority like as if he were a Lake; and her poor father not cold in his coffin. And the men that have come in from the country! It sure makes me feel like I shouldn't be here—me being strict, and a good woman."

Louis did not go, now that Catherine had been met and repulsed; he stayed behind and screened by pine trees watched the melancholy group.

A long narrow-looking coffin, which proved the reproduction of Silvester's figure during the last few months, and then the pitiful procession, empty and forlorn. A slender black figure was the only mourner; and as Louis craned his neck and saw the set of the shoulders, the movement of the flower-like head, he drew back to say in awed tones: "That's enough for me," and he turned, and took a circuitous route home; and as he plodded through sumac and sunflowers and goldenrod, he said: "I feel sad for her, because I'll always think what she did for me. And them that make us feel like she made me feel, we'd like to always see them happy and safe from harm. I'd put her in a beautiful land of fairy delights, with birds, beasts, and flowers talkin' to her to beat the band, and I'd give her a liberty-lovin' man to watch over her, and then I'd have them go huntin' together out in the open. Sure, she's beautiful and good, and I don't think I'd ever felt—anythin'—before—till then! sure!"

CHAPTER III

A TIGER DISGUISED

S PEN came once more, with a message from Silvia Lake to Louis Buttress.

“Say you! You’re in favour! There a smash up at Ari-wa-kis and the sale’s to-morrow; and you’re asked by Miss Lake to look after the stock, time they’re gettin’ sold. Says you’ll be good to ’em. Wants to know if you’ll have the dog, Simon?”

“I’ll buy it,” said Louis. “Can’t pay much, but I’ll buy it.”

“She’ll never sell Simon. She’ll give him to you. Don’t think Testy will like it though! Now I’ve gotten no dog, and wantin’ one. I’d have taken it and petted it.”

“I’ll take it,” said Louis, “and I’ll come and

mind the stock. But I'll do no talkin'—can't do that at any price."

"Right. I'll book you down,—'a dumb man will bring out the stock.' Say, I'm gettin' madder and madder. The kid won't have Catherine Talbot to stay up there at nights."

"Don't blame her," said Louis. "Couldn't 'bide' it myself."

"It's time she went then. I don't like Sheridan very good. I'd rather she married him than Din, 'cos Bill Din and me have scrapped so together, that I'd take it bad to see him haul off the prize—same time I don't see the sense of an Englishman biddin' in for Silvia."

"What's she goin' to do?"

"She's goin' to her aunt first thing, after the sale. Someone's got to take her across the desert. The question that's rife in Alamanca Creek is 'who?'"

"Bill Din, I should think," said Louis. "He knows all the tracks, and he's a known character."

"You bet! He *is* a known character. Wal,

then, I can't say I like it. He's known to be after the girl."

"So are you."

"Sure—if he can do it, I can. I'd give all I possess to do it. Wouldn't I just take care of her if she'd trust me. She don't say nothin', 'cept to order us all about, and keep us busy, so we can't talk to her, and she says she's goin' after the sale."

And Spen got up and went out again, having said all that was on his mind.

Silvia Lake was up at four on the morning of the sale; and Sheridan and Bill Din arrived together, somewhere about six. The girl had done all her baking the night before; so she was ready to receive them, and came out on the porch when she heard their step.

Simon was at her heels. Since her father's death the dog never left his mistress.

"Bill," she said, "I want you to take the catalogue and go round and see the labels is all right."

Bill gave one swift look at Sheridan and went slowly away.

Silvia said, "Come in, Jack, I've got something to give you—my father left you a book."

Sheridan followed her into the living-room, and Silvia went to her father's desk and began moving the papers and letters.

She moved them slowly and reluctantly. Sheridan, who had been standing by the table waiting for her to turn around to speak to him, found the time long and trying, so he went to the window.

He waited for some time, and seeing that she was still turning over the papers, he frowned and looked earnestly at her. Getting no satisfaction from the continued silence he went to the door and shut it.

"Did he really leave me something, Silvia? I'll treasure it as long as I live!"

Silvia had a book in her hand, and was turning the pages slowly, backwards and forwards. She took it up, looked long at it, and then handed it to him.

"Yes, he left it you. He thought a lot of you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. Then when are you going?"

"To-morrow."

Sheridan came up to her and stood close beside her. "I hope, Silvia," he said, "that you'll let me help you with regard to the arrangements."

There was a dead silence.

Sheridan continued. "Considering everything, your need of care and protection, I feel anxious about you."

Silvia went pale. She bit her lips and looked rapidly about her, as though in search of something that ought to have been present, but was not to be found anywhere. Then she said suddenly, "It's comin', Jack, it's all a'comin' to me. Before I quit Ari-wa-kis I'm to do a bit o' talking to you."

"Yes, I hoped so, Silvia. I've been hoping you would. I knew all this quietness, almost coldness, was the result of your father's death, and—and, why do you look so at me? Are you ill?"

"I ain't ill. I ain't anythin' but fire. I'm fire through and through! You've got to hear me, Jack. I'm—I'm— Let's see, where's my head this

mornin'? I can't git things clear some way, same as I want. I'd made a vow I'd keep still but I ain't able, I ain't made that way. We'll step back to May 15th of last year."

"No, we won't. We'll never go back there. That's all done and ended."

"It ain't ended. It's all to be done over again. It's all to be gone into to show you what you are. May 15th it was—a spring morning. Oh, yes—you and me, Jack, we set off for a day's pleasure—a day's pleasure! Do you hear me?"

"O, Silvia, I hear you—any one would hear you. I beg of you to stop——"

"When I've done and not before! Come on, Jack. You ain't a coward, are you? A day's pleasure. Bluebirds out, sky blue, sun shining, birds a'singin'—and you and me—out for a day's pleasure! Let's git back into it. Don't it sound straight? A dandy day, you and me—out for a day's——"

"Silvia, are you going mad?"

"You are, ain't you? Think it over. What

was it Dad said? ‘When will you be home again?’ Dad was sure easy done. Who answered him, ‘O we was comin’ back good and early’? Everything straight that day. And we went off, and we went along one track, and then we went along another, and we was engaged in talking, and we went on—O, that road! I’ll never forget that road.”

“Silvia, I implore you! I beg, implore, beseech you!”

“Do it! Do more of it! But I’m agoin’ on. That road, where the pines brushed us. I scratched my cheek. I let you rub it—you! You, Jack Sheridan! I see myself! I see myself allowin’ you to do it! And then where did we lose the way? Ask God in Heaven where we lost the way.”

“We got a little bit late, that’s all!”

“O, that was all, was it? Who got mixed, you or me? I sometimes think I ain’t got a head—until—until there’s danger. It was where the road ended and the Creek came in—it was gittin’ dark—that’s

the time I oughter a' been home if you hadn't gotten out o' the track—done somethin' or another—to get me all tired out. For pity's sake, you had me there! I was sure done!"

"No harm's done! Do you see any use in this, all this, Silvia?"

"No, not a bit! No use! I'm a'comin' to the part that's useful. All of a sudden the truth came out, came leaping out like a great big tiger. You was holdin' me tight—on that lonely road—and only the dark and the moon a'looking at us! And if God had told me when I'd come into the world what I was to expect, it would have been a lot, lot better! No, I ain't goin' to say that against my God, because God was there. There in the midst of us, there was God, a'watchin' and a'waitin'. And I didn't know it, and the dark gaped at me, and I thought of my innocent old dad a'readin' in the dusk—and me—where I was—and then I said to God—'Come right now! You're wanted! I'll have You, God! I'll have You right now, all over me body!' And He came into me. It made some

difference right off. I was free. And then some-thin' tol' me 'Take his hand, and let God git into his fingers so he'll feel it same as you have it.' And I give you the tips of my fingers, and you held them, against your will, until the fire burnt you, burnt you to your soul, and you shuddered and shrank away, and got some distance between you and me. And then I felt like as if warm fires were a'sheddin' somethin' over me, and it come to me, like a great big voice: 'There ain't no use in caretakers and chaperones and men and women a'shuttin' you up and telling you nothing—there ain't no use in shutting up, anyway. It's just God that's wanted.' That was sure a big lesson, anyway! I ain't got faith in the men that believes in guarding you. There's the rascal, believe me! And if I come to think of it, May 15th was a perfectly straight day, same as any other."

The door opened and Din entered the room.

"Good-bye, Jack," called Silvia. "Now you remember what I've said and maybe you'll feel

some different about a lot o' things. Bill, open the window. I got up too early this morning and it ain't agreed with me."

Bill Din opened the window; and Jack Sheridan went out, mounted his horse, and rode away.

CHAPTER IV

SILVIA'S CHOSEN GUIDE

Louis Buttress drew near to Ari-wa-kis with extreme reluctance.

There was no man in the neighbourhood more anxious to perform a service for Sylvester Lake's daughter; but he was the only man in the neighbourhood who would have preferred to have done that service in an unknown way.

As he neared the house the dog, Testy, scented some sport, and left his side.

So Buttress, pulling himself together, went about the task of reaching the yard, without encountering too many people.

"I'll look for Bill Din, I'm at home with Bill Din," he said, and leaping the fence he made for a tall handsome man standing in the centre of the yard.

"Good for you, Louis," said Bill.

"I thought I'd come," said Buttress, blinking his eyes and looking at the group of men as though he were taken prisoner. "I'm going presently. You ain't any idea of what a grand day it is for the water. There ain't a speck of thunder—but I'll mind them poor disturbed souls which are gettin' their lives sold away. Let's see, Bill, who's auctioneer? Right! Now I'll bring the beasts out, but I'll not speak. Look 'ere, Bill, you answer if folk turn to me. Tell Spen—where's Spen? He talks best in the hul county."

A man told Bill that Miss Lake wanted him, so he disappeared in the twinkling of an eye; but came back to the stables, where he found Buttress alone, for Spen had gone after more lively company.

"How's the lady?" inquired Buttress.

"Rather down; the day's blue for her. Never heard you ask after a lady before, Louis."

"Can't say that I ever did," said Louis. "Ain't this pony petted? She'll have played with the mare and talked to her."

"I give it to Miss Lake myself," said Din, blushing as he said it. "She's called 'Star.' I'm aiming to buy her in."

"That's good news," said Buttress.

"I've good news for you," said Din, in a low voice to Buttress.

"How?" inquired Buttress. "River or lake?"

"Good God!" said Din. "Ain't you never human?"

"How?" Buttress inquired again.

"Miss Lake wants you to get her across the desert to the junction."

"Me?"

"Sure."

"Did you tell her the truth about me, Din? How I'd serve her in any way possible, but couldn't no more take the responsibility than my dog there could do it. He can follow me, or bring me a bit o' game. He can count the sheep, but he can't be responsible. Did you tell her?"

For answer Din made a grimace.

"You did, then. What did she say?"

"She asked me if I'd rather you or Sheridan took her. I said you. I said that Sheridan shouldn't never take her while there was one of us left to do it!"

"Sure!" said Louis, with a deep breath. "One of us folks should do it. What about you?"

"I love the girl."

"Well?" Louis said, looking hard at Din.

"You're all right, Louis; straight as a running fox, but you must remember the world. They all know how I'm mad in love with her. You know nothin' of mad love, do you?"

"I kinder realize it."

"Wal', then realize that though I'd love it, and I'd do it if necessary, I'd rather one as had never looked at her did it. It must be right, she's thought it out herself, and she'll know best."

"Sure," said Louis, suddenly.

"Then you'll trust her and do it? That's a man. Go, while you're roused, and tell her how you feel——"

"Me? Go into a house?"

"Course! You must wake up, Buttress. Clean that mud off your over-all. Pity you ain't gotten a clean pair for a public day of this sort. Now then, let's look at you. What's that stuff tied about your left knee for?"

"That's where a hole come, and I ain't had the time yet to patch it up. She'll never notice my knee, Din, she'll be lookin' at my face."

"You seem to know how she looks," said Din, "'cos she does look straight. But a man should come before a lady as fine as he can be—not all mussed up. It ain't no use tellin' you to comb out that tangle of hair. Truth to tell you're a bit barbaric—your eyes is the only clean bit about you."

"This is more than I can bear. I ain't fit to look at a lady?" said Louis.

"You're fit to look and fit to talk to a lady. She'll excuse your misfits in clothes, 'cos she knows you of old and by report. Now you just go and be yourself. The women will let you through into the——"

"Women?" said Louis.

"They'll not hurt you. Go right through 'em, and don't speak if you can't manage it, though a polite good-morning don't hurt any one. Don't stop to think, but go! First door on the left, once you're through the kitchen."

Buttress touched the pony, fondled it, and left it suddenly. He had grown pale, Din could see it under the russet of exposure, which gave the skin a curious look.

"Life's bitter hard," said the hunter, as he got to the stable door.

"Sure it is!" said Bill Din, regretfully.

Louis was walking slowly, and with the meaning of a great purpose, so everybody looked at him—even the auctioneer, who was giving some papers to the clerk. When the kitchen was reached, the man made a plunge forward; but somebody had scent in their handkerchief, and it made Louis's head reel. He caught the door for support.

"Mornin'," he said desperately.

A group of women turned and spoke; but they

were so full of curiosity, that their good-morning had no meaning to it.

Louis gathered this, and strung himself up to further efforts. He walked through the kitchen and took a plunge into unknown regions, and he knew the women were discussing him when he had gone.

Then he forgot them, because the parlour door was open, and he saw Miss Lake standing by the window.

And there was Ari-wa-kis, glistening away in a faint gleam of passing sunlight! And the windows were wide open, and he could hear the squawking blue jays, and he breathed again.

He had held his hat in his hand, but now he put it on his head again, feeling that he ought to do something or other; but he took it off again as he approached the girl.

She saw that he was trembling and could not hold his fingers still, and she bit her lips.

"Did Mr. Din tell you what I'd asked of you, Mr. Buttress?"

"He did—told me—he did."

"Perhaps you don't care to go away from Ari-wa-kis, even for a day? I asked you. . . . You see, I know you."

There was a dead silence, only Louis Buttress looked at Silvia, and she looked at him. There was a clock in the room and the ticking maddened Louis, who was thinking deeply

"Stop him!" he said suddenly.

Silvia took it out of the room, and came back to find his eyes eagerly awaiting her return.

"Miss Lake," he said.

She waited for his words, turning away when she saw he was not ready, and the knowledge that she did not hurry him sent a peaceful glow over the hunter's disturbed feelings.

She opened another window. "There's the south side of the lake, where you was hunting," she said. "How many geese were there, Mr. Buttress?"

"There was a round dozen—the thirteenth went up after; I seen it after I seen you, Miss

Lake—I'll take you over the desert—I can do it in a day."

"The men say it takes nearer two days?"

"With me it's a one-day job. I know all the best tracks, Miss Lake. I can show you something that'll interest you. I know a good place where we'll rest the horses. I ain't a fancy guide, but I'll do it. You're right, Miss Lake, I'm the man for the job."

"Thank you, Mr. Buttress. To-morrow?"

"To-morrow, and I'll keep your dog good and safe till you come back to claim him. I ain't much of a guide to appear before strangers, but I'll give you the slip when we've bridged the desert and got on the common track. Good-morning, Miss Lake."

"Good-morning, Mr. Buttress."

Louis went out of the kitchen without a single thought for the crowd of observers. A voice was singing in his ears, and the song was: "Good-morning, Mr. Buttress."

The yard was reached at last, and he found him-

self hurling animals out into a muddy ring in a faint mist and some fine rain. He did not know how it was done, but custom did the work in such a way that the auctioneer was praising him.

Louis's eyes were full of wonder, and Bill Din sought a word: "You'll do it then?"

"Promised," said Louis desperately.

"That's right. You'll be rewarded for this. I'll come up to-night, and we'll fix things good and comfortable for the journey."

"Sure—you'd best come," said Louis, "my head-piece is all of a whirl, and I ain't gotten fingers—they're all thumbs."

Bill Din laughed, and Spen, watching from a distance, grew silent and thoughtful.

CHAPTER V

BILL DIN PROVIDES

TRUE to his word Bill Din arrived to furnish the hunter with the means of journeying. Louis was amazed to see the bundle that was thrown down on his wooden table.

"What's all that?" he said.

"Your wardrobe," said Bill Din.

"There I stop," said Louis. "I don't put no trust in clothes—strange ones in particular. Did you see how queer I looked at the funeral? It was my strange clothes."

"Listen to me, Louis. These togs ain't the horrible truck you wore on that gloomy day. These is sporting clothes, true sporting clothes, that'll give you a new impression of yourself."

"New things are out of my track. I'll lose

my way in the desert if I'm got up like a play actor."

"Look at this coat! It's made for you, a mad hunter. Look at it, free about the throat and leather on the shoulders where the gun comes, and a kinder style of its own, too. Now put that coat on, and I bet you'll feel comfortable. For Miss Lake's guide you must be a guide. Look at this hat. It's real good, and I tell you the birds and beasts will like it. Smells of the woods, too. I've done a lot o' huntin' in it myself. It's a dandy hat, and I lend it to you because you're Miss Lake's guide."

"You're real good," said Louis, "to see me through my trouble."

"You're the limit," said Bill Din. "Trouble, why, it's a privilege!"

"I'm so dratted nervous, and ignorant. Our family was always out of the running of the world. I don't mind the hat, I feel as if it was mine, as soon as I seen it. No ties—I ain't goin' to have a tie! That slapping green tie may suit a dashing

youth who rides ponies in the eye of the public, but it's plumb ridik'lous for a retired sort like me."

"It gives you a wonderful air," said Din thoughtfully. "I ask you to wear it for a minute to please me. Ain't you got a looking-glass!"

"It's a poor one," said Louis. "I can see myself in the lake any day."

There was a rattle on the door; it was flung violently open, and Spen entered the room. He gazed in amazement at the two men.

An old lamp burning on the bracket near the door went up into a flaming smoking daub, and revealed Louis in his sporting suit. Bill Din was leaning against the table to get the full effect by a backward tilt.

"What on earth?" cried Spen.

"That's our guide," said Bill Din, curtly.

Spen remained motionless, but his eyelids quivered; and Louis, who had already looked into the young man's face, said: "Miss Lake, Spen."

"You takin' her?" inquired Spen.

"He's the man," said Din.

"Then what are *you* doin' here?" inquired Spen, turning savagely on Bill.

"Fixing his clothes, so they'll be good and suitable for the journey with the lady."

Spen kicked Louis's long boots under the table, and frowned at Bill Din.

"I guess I'll go—and see Sheridan," he said.

"You're welcome, Spen," said Louis. "I'm much obliged to Bill for fittin' me out, but there may be need of more'n one, with such a wild one as me. I'm sure out at holes on every side of me, but you're welcome to do as you please."

Bill Din smiled faintly at this round-about speech, and Spen retreated into the darkness of the night.

"Birds of a feather flock together," said Bill Din. "He's mad he ain't the guide. It's best it's you, Louis, on all accounts. Now the clothes is fixed, I'll tell you about the ponies—you may want another—will your Peggy go with my Gin-fly?"

"Peg will go with Star," said Louis.

"That's good," said Bill. "Let Star take the lady as long as she's in the country. I've brought you a basket with some food and dishes; and when you camp for the night you can see what it is."

"I could pick up food," said Louis. "I'll take the gun. It would be somethin' to pass the time."

"Take my basket, too. There's all there a girl'll want for supper. You don't know very good what girls like. Would you have thought of chocolate?"

Louis shook his head.

"I've forgotten nothin'," said Bill, "nothin' left to think of! The last bit o' pleasure for months to come. You don't know the pain love is—you're fixed high and dry on safe shores by the passion of huntin'. I've sometimes thought it was good to be you, Louis. To have your job as guide, I'd have given all I'm possessed of, and you take it cool as a winter night. I'm tortured with doubt—will she remember me in six months, when next I see her?"

Bill Din had flung himself on the floor of Louis's

shanty, and was putting a stick of cherry wood into the open door of the stove, stirring up some dead ashes.

Louis looked miserable and said after a while: "If it makes you so ill to think of her forgettin', go and clinch it, go right over this minute to Ari-wa-kis, and tell her she's your everything."

"What good'll *that* do, if she ain't of the same mind as me?"

"Then she don't—wal'—she don't show hopeful signs of partiality?" inquired Louis.

"She thinks *some* of me. She was a bit partial to Sheridan last summer. I've died in my soul many a hot day last haying season. Seen her look kinder believin' at him, when he was makin' up stories to beat the band. I couldn't tell the girl there ain't nothin' to him, if she couldn't see for herself."

"Spen, perhaps?" said Louis.

"Spen's a chicken who thinks himself a swan. She laughs at Spen, but she don't treat him serious. What I fear is the future when she's gone to her

aunt. To tell you my whole heart, Louis, I'm first with Miss Lake at the present moment; but she don't love me—oh, she don't love me. She's young and self-willed, and she don't know she's born."

Louis patted Din's shoulder. There was not more than nine years between the two men; and a brotherly tenderness suddenly enveloped the hunter. He thought of all the love tales in the forest, and how many happy creatures there were in spring; and he wondered why this poor "human" should have to love "just one" who could not love him.

"A criss-cross world," said Louis, stepping over Bill's outstretched form. "Much overrated in some ways, and not valued at its full worth in others. Get up, man, and look at the stars! The moon's out, and if you listen very good you can hear a fox bark. The air's good, and the breath of nature ain't taken from you, because a girl don't jump into your open arms."

Din rose up, shook his head sadly at Louis,

and went out into the company of the moon and stars.

"He's got the night," said Louis, "and the wild calling to him. He ain't utterly lost."

CHAPTER VI

BILL'S GOOD-BYE TO SILVIA

Louis had a nightmare the evening before the journey. He dreamed that he had nothing ready for the voyage, and that he kept losing Miss Lake, the horses, the buggy, or the baggage. He awaked at four o'clock in the morning to see daylight stealing into the shanty; and in his own words he trembled at the "stark madness" of the responsibility he had incurred.

"How I've got into the trap, I don't know, for trap it is, as bad for poor Miss Lake as anybody. Bill Din should have done it."

He went down to the lake to bathe, and felt cheered with the contact of the water. As he looked at the pine trees on the south shore, he said to himself:

"Dear ole Ari-wa-kis, I'll be back huntin' the day after to-morrow."

He returned and dressed himself in the guide's romantic costume. It was easy in fit, so Louis forgot that it was not his old suit.

He had just prepared some corn mush, and was sitting on the table eating it from a basin, with a large iron spoon, when the wheels of the buggy broke the morning silence, and Bill Din came running into the kitchen.

"I've brought Star, and I'll change the harness and git Peggy, while you finish your mush. Louis, you're a good-looking man, and it's blamed wicked to deface nature with dirt. Why don't you wash and dress like the rest of us, and keep huntin' in its place?"

"Don't mention huntin' this mornin'," said Louis, "if you do, my courage will eke out into my shoes, and git back to Mother Earth. We'd better make a bee-line for Ari-wa-kis, and shoulder the trouble right now."

The two men got into the buggy and drove away.

Ari-wa-kis reached, Bill Din ran into the house. Running was all he could do this morning, for there was no taking things calmly. He found Silvia Lake in the room facing the water, the place where she had spent the main part of eighteen wild years of liberty. Bill stopped running when he saw her. She was sitting at the table, with her face buried in her hands. Her hat and gloves were lying ready, with a veil to tie about her ears; and she looked utterly alone.

Bill bit his lips, and sent a wild, unworded prayer to his Creator to keep him from trespassing further on the sorrows of this young girl.

He waited for her to speak to him, with the big tears close to his narrow grey eyes, but pushed back by a hard bitter schooling in a rough world, which brooked no displays of feeling. Silvia knew he was there but she could not speak to him. Her eyes went to her dog, Simon, who was now licking her, wherever he had a chance, trying to make his tongue show his affection to his beloved mistress.

By and by the girl went down on her knees and threw her arms around the dog, and began to sob, and wail out: "Poor ole Dad! When we had him, Simon, we held him cheap. And it's all done now, closed, done, and sealed. And here's the new life, and I ain't ready for it. Oh, Simon, Simon!"

It was more than Bill Din could bear, and all the vows he had made to strangle his love until her trouble was further distant, went to the four winds of Heaven.

"Don't, Silvia," he said. "Don't, my beautiful, precious girl! You ain't any need to go a step across the desert. Here I am, Bill Din, would marry you to-morrow, and would buy in Ari-wa-kis for you, and if the dough ain't sufficient would rent it—until the amount was made up."

Silvia looked up now, straight into the face of Bill Din. There was not only the lover but the father in the man's eyes.

"Bill," she said very softly, "in time of trouble, out comes the gold and away flies the tinsel."

"That's right," he said.

"You've been gold, Bill."

"You never said nothin' in answer to me?"
Bill asked her.

Silvia was still stroking the dog, and she put her other hand into Bill's palm.

"It ain't right, Bill. With all my troubles I'm still a kid."

"I like kids," said Bill. "I vow I'll marry the woman that calls herself a kid. That's the draw to me—the double magnet—Silvia."

"Kids don't know their own minds, Bill. I ought to be honest with real gold like you've been. I love Ari-wa-kis next to me father. I love the shore and the lake and the growin' plants and my wanderin's and my liberty. Bill, Bill, it's my liberty I love, and I ain't going to cheat a real man like you. It's parting with Ari-wa-kis, and Simon, and the whole life."

In a transport of misery the girl embraced the dog, who whined wretchedly, and shed a tear of agony out of a bluish-green eye.

Bill drew himself up to his full height, and looked

across the room at a picture, which was as familiar as his own hand.

"I realize what you mean, kid. Things must go their own slow way. Are you to sell Ari-wa-kis? I could rent it if you like?"

"I'll let you know, Bill. Perhaps my uncle will buy it, and then everything could stay as it is for the present. You've enough with your horses and the grass-land. You don't want Ari-wa-kis."

"You'll let me rent it, if it has to go, Silvia?"

"I will, if my uncle won't buy it! But I'll pay the debts within a year if I can. I'm all for learnin', Bill, and schoolin'. What do you say to me goin' to college?"

"It'll just spoil you," said Bill. "Do you mean to tell me that any of those ole colleges can make you better than you are? Tain't schoolin' as makes ladies and gentlemen."

"I'm great on learnin', all the same, Bill, and I'm sure going to college. What makes *you* so interestin' to hear when you talk about ponies? 'Cos you're so truly educated on a pony's nature."

She picked up her hat and pinned it on her head. Bill took the veil and tied it under her chin and round her neck.

"You'll let me dress the kid. Kids allow it," he said.

And so Silvia and Bill came out together; to the man waiting by the two horses, Star and Peggy.

Simon followed, whining.

"Shut that dog up," cried Louis to Bill, "or shall I?"

"You," said Bill Din.

Off went Louis Buttress and he spoke so gently to the dog that he soon had him following him. He returned alone.

Bill had put Silvia in the buggy and was standing close by, talking eagerly.

"Gittin' a look in," said Louis to himself, "poor fellow! It's an unlucky thing to feel one idea too much in this transitory world. Hi, Bill!" he shouted. "Will you see to that poor dog and put him up real good, and take him huntin' till I come back to do it?"

"Sure!" said Bill.

He clasped Silvia's hands in a desperate way and then came to Louis Buttress, and said savagely:

"A'talkin' of that dog as if it was more real than me. What about me? What about me? What am I to do with myself?"

"Go huntin'," said Louis, "with the dog, as I told you. I'm sure sorry for you."

Bill went like the wind. He was running away from his joy and his hope. Louis watched him in wonderment.

"What did Bill say to you?" inquired Silvia.

"Just a word about the dog, Miss Lake. We're off now," said Louis.

But when they had started on the journey, and Silvia was wrapped in a profound reverie, her eyes still dim with a night's weeping, Louis was saying to himself:

"Women always like to know everything; I've heard my father say my mother was so, but it ain't good for her to know about poor Bill, and I ain't tellin' her what he said to me."

CHAPTER VII

A HALT IN PARADISE

Louis Buttress, talking to the ponies and aware that the tired girl had fallen asleep, was a happy man. Here was a fine portion of the journey transacted, and not a word expected of him.

"I'll make tracks while there's the safety of silence," he said, glancing at the girl from time to time. "She looks nothing to be afraid of, but there lies the mystery. When she begins to speak, I feel insufficient somehow. My life's out of this line."

The desert was not a desert, it was a plateau of desolate rocks, over which there was no growth, but a few scrubby pines and weeds. The two or three roads across it were very rough travelling, and some of them dangerous. Louis had arranged to

take the short but severe route, and as soon as he left the country behind him, and mounted up towards the desolate land, the girl aroused herself and looked quickly about her.

"Now for it," said Louis to himself, "it keeps me going, racking my brains to mind the road and here, at the worst moment, comes the talking. Darn it, what shall I say?"

"Have you ever been here before?" asked the girl.

"Scores o' times," said Louis. "How coarse my voice is!" he said to himself.

"Ain't it weird?" she continued.

"Yep," said Louis. "The blamed word's wrong, I know it is!" he thought.

"Do you know how it strikes me?" she continued.

"I ain't thought of it, yet," said Louis, carefully.

"Hell," said Silvia.

Louis never spoke, for he was thoroughly aroused. So she could think of hell, could she? That was a great surprise.

"Look right across there," said the girl, "look at them jagged rocks, with deep dinges in them. What a colour! Couldn't you think imps were jumpin' in and out of hell's ovens?"

"Darn me I could, Miss Lake. I'm thinkin' of coons and foxes, and I once seen a skunk in one of them deep dinges. She had her little babies there."

"I call a skunk an imp," said Silvia. "Great limpin' cats, stalkin' up to you with stupid eyes gazin' at your face to scare you."

"You know them all right," said Louis; "do you know the old skunk with the white stripe down her back, living near Ari-wa-kis?"

"Sure," said Silvia. "You too?"

"Sure. I like that ole lady, she and me have come pretty close; and she ain't anythin' but friendship for me. I like foxes best."

"Why?" asked Silvia.

"Somethin' gamey and smart. I ain't smart—'spect that's why I like a smart animal. Then the freedom of the little foxes, barkin' in the woods,

and runnin' like the wind, and gittin' game at hair-breadth dashes. O, I like 'em!"

"I'd like to be a fox," said Silvia.

"Why?" asked Louis.

"So I could run wild," said Silvia.

Again Louis was too profoundly interested to venture a word. He had lived for eighteen years near Sylvester Lake's daughter, and he had known her of late through personal encounters, and through Spen's long stories; yet where did this fit with his ideas?

The road was very bad now, but instead of finding it difficult to conduct conversation and drive the horses Louis began to find the way remarkably easy. Oil had got into everything, wheels, road, horses, and man.

"Glad she's cheerin' up," he said to himself, "wait till we encamp for the evening and I'll show her some sport. She's a real true living creature, full of nature, and now I see why Bill Din must have her for his wife."

He gave her a furtive look. She was gazing

backwards, towards the country she was leaving, and Louis felt the pang of her homesickness.

"Being made as you are," he said, "pity you ain't stayin' in Ari-wa-kis."

"Another door opens," said Silvia.

"What's that you say?" inquired Louis.

"I'm great on learnin'," said Silvia. "I know you'll be surprised, but I'm going to college, and figure on doin' a lot of book work in the next three years."

"A pity!" said Louis.

"I thought you'd say somethin' of that sort. I know Bill and you think it means sawdust and rags, but I tell you, Mr. Buttress, it means everythin' to Ari-wa-kis. I'll come back to Ari-wa-kis, to understand foxes as I never understood 'em in the old days. That's education."

"Tain't what the world considers it," said Louis. "It's all red-tape knowledge that the world teaches in the schools—such as the kingdom that's gone in past ages, and the country that's not yet discovered."

"Well, if you look carefully at your remark," said Silvia, "you'll see that to know all that far-away knowledge helps what's at your hand."

Louis nearly had an upset on a big stone, and judged it wiser to direct his attention to near-at-hand knowledge.

The sun had reached meridian, and was now turning the scale for the afternoon descent. The buggy was in the midst of rocky ledges, and the bare bleak situation had its effect on the two travellers. The sun beat down without shade, and although it was the end of August, the heat was great. There was no talking done for the next two hours, but, strange to say, Louis found the silence as easy as the speech. There was no effort in driving Miss Lake through the desert.

It was play-work.

It was easier than driving himself.

"She helps me someway, and now I understand poor Bill," he thought.

Evening brought the surprise that Buttress had

counted on giving to Miss Lake. The rocky road fell into a dell, where a stream ran, and was obscured by wood, containing many oaks and some birches.

Here was the halt.

"Paradise," said Silvia.

"Hell's gone," said Louis, dismounting and attending to the horses.

He was saying to himself: "Should I help her to get out? No—better not! Don't know how to go about it!" So he patted the horses instead.

"Is this the camp?" said Silvia.

"Sure," said Louis.

"Ain't it a dandy halt! You sure know the way to go. Say, there's squirrels in that wood. Are you goin' huntin'?"

"Wal'—that's—sure, I'd like it—but——"

"Well, why not? Go and hunt our supper out o' that wood. I'll be squaw and git things set out. What's in that big basket?"

"Fodder," said Louis.

"That's stuff for horses."

"Then victuals—my mother called it victuals—but I thought it was gone out."

"Never as long as folks git hungry," said Silvia.
"You git off huntin' and don't talk so much—you talk to beat the band."

Louis had already unharnessed the horses and was letting them go.

"Me?" he exclaimed.

"You, Mr. Buttress."

"Drat it!" said Louis, "I wouldn't a'thought it for a minute."

"Then think it for an hour, while you hunt, and when you come back, Mr. Buttress, the banquet is served."

Louis went off into the bush with a light step. Gay is not the word. He was buoyant with something that though airy and arousing, yet ran deep in his being.

"A wonderful young woman," he said, "and I hope Din gets the mastery."

He crept in and out of hazel, and sumac, and

birch, bent on good victuals. He had never needed to provide for another.

"She ain't an easy capture," he muttered, "she's off at too many tangents, and casts her eyes too far. Woman's better held firm—that's what father said about mother—and he appeared to have had need to know it. Mother was boss."

And Louis espied a bird that he wanted, and he fired, and he got it.

"I was certain sure I'd have it, and I have it—nothin' like havin' to feed someone. It's better than yourself. She's kinder sparkling with her tongue, but she's tender in the eye—like these young deer with the velvet looks. She means real well and the very best. Whatever she says and does, Silvia Lake means the best."

He stopped to look at a squirrel, who was scolding him violently.

"There's a bossy woman," he said, "but it's cheerful, kinder cheerful—father missed it, when mother went from him. He tol' me so many a time!"

He gazed up into the tall fir tree, and the squirrel, a grey, plump creature, stopped scolding. Then an "ohoy" rang out in a woman's clear voice, and Louis started like one guilty, saying: "Drat it! Supper's ready! The first time I ever took food with the feminine side of life—'course I must be late, can't do nothin' respectable."

And he trudged off.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HUNTER CAN TALK

"AIN'T it a pity you're such a good shot?"
remarked Silvia.

Buttress, standing before Miss Lake with the dead bird in his left hand, looked at her in surprise.

"For the bird's sake I mean," said the girl,
"It's a kinder pity we had to kill something."

Louis took the bird and placed it out of sight, and returned to the grass where Silvia had spread out the contents of the basket.

"If you ain't against the bird when fried in the morning, I'll give you a hunter's breakfast. Grilled bird and fried berries—how does that sound?"

"You ain't praised the squaw for her supper yet."

"It ain't for me, is it?"

"Now you're used to eatin' alone," said Silvia, "so I'll spoil the feast."

"You ain't spoilin' it one bit," said Louis, "I kinder like you bein' around."

How did this speech come out? Louis wondered at himself, but concluded—"Instinct—my father did it—that's it."

"I'm pleased you don't mind me eatin' with you—I'm not to be a squaw and have bones thrown to me—but that's enough for nonsense! Mr. Buttress, *I'm real serious.*"

Louis, drinking coffee, looked into her grave eyes.

"I know," he said, "that's you, Miss Lake."

"A pretty good guess of me, Mr. Buttress, 'cos no one realizes how serious I am, and have always been. They give me a butterfly's name, but I've been right through everything, and seen how hollow the world is, and I believe you're the child, and I'm the grown-up."

"You can believe anything you like," said Louis.

"Wal', then, I don't believe that you packed that hamper, Mr. Buttress."

Louis blinked. "'Twas Bill Din."

"Sure, it ain't like you, and nothin' in the basket was like you, neither!"

"Shows what a good friend you have in Bill Din, Miss Lake."

"It sure does!"

There was a silence, and then Silvia began again:

"I'm real old, and my life's all gone to pieces."

Louis looked in astonishment.

"I don't care for nothin' now father's gone. Only 'cept the one thing left—to be a scholar. I'll go into that with all my might, and you and Bill must take care of Star and Simon. But there's nothing in the world, Mr. Buttress, nothing at all! It's as empty—as empty as all the nut shells near a squirrel's nest."

"That's empty enough—sure!" said Louis.

"That's true! Have you never felt the emptiness of the world, Mr. Buttress?"

"Never," said Louis, "that's out of my line."

"What do you think about life?"

"Me?" said Louis. "Think? What curious different forms it takes, and how the one law works in with the others, making the forms full o' meaning."

"I call you royalty," said Silvia.

"You're wrong there," said Louis, "our family was of no account whatever—plumb down at the bottom—my father was a poacher in Lincolnshire, and the vicar of that parish, where he lived, was as wise as Solomon, for he told my mother that father was 'cureless'—I mean by that expression, which was a good one belonging to my mother, that 'twas no use stopping father from poachin'—so our vicar he said to mother: 'You take father where poachin's right, and thus you stop the sin.' Now father was against it, for he loved them big woods—he's told me about them over and over again—for there was ivy on the trees, and it shone and was glossy, but sometimes it killed the tree, but father loved them living or dead; and in the moon-

light, poachin' game was what he called pure joy, so he had the feelings bad. He said he fought mother and the vicar, he'd rather go once or twice to gaol and be in England, but he says the Church and the woman were too much for any one man to fight alone—and he found himself at last in U. S. A."

"A pretty good thing, I should think too!" said Silvia. "Game's for everybody, I should say!"

"But the queer thing is that father don't like it when it's lawful—he took no more real pleasure in it once he was free of the whole woods. 'Drat it, Louis,' he says to me, 'there's nothin' to run up against, the hul thing's as stupid as a suet puddin'.' My father never liked suet puddin's—they were somethin' mother made pretty often."

"You are a good talker," said Silvia, "they call you 'the silent hunter'—I'd call you 'good company.'"

"Wal', I don't tell these things as a rule," said Louis, "they're slippin' out unbeknownst. I feel Lincolny to-day—some days I feel more Lincolny

than others. I can fancy now, in this pretty dusk, with the smoke wreathing up from that bit of fire—I can fancy I can see that village church. Father loved that church. He'd have shot any one who touched a stone of it."

"Then he was religious?" said Silvia.

"He never went into church, if that's what you mean. I only once heard him say a prayer. It was a coon, and he was hard to get. 'Lord,' he says, 'let me have 'im.'"

"I like your father," said Silvia, "but he sounds kinder queer. I believe he's a bit like me. You ain't like him, you're quieter, I should think. Was your father called 'Louis'?"

"My father was a Timothy, but he called me Louis after the Squire. "'Cos,' he says, 'though the Squire nabbed me three times, and I was a gaol bird, 'twas the Squire's gamekeeper that gave me my excitement; so now, when I'm landed on these dull shores,' he said, 'these wildernesses of miserable unpreserved game, I'll remember my joy in my son,' he said, 'and I'll have him Louis'—

my mother grumbled but she had to give in this time."

"Well, now," said Silvia, "I'll stick to my word —you ain't a bit like your father, you're more like that squire, so you're more like royalty. You make your own laws, and keep 'em. For fear they should be broken you stay out o' the crowd, so you miss the bitterness of the world."

"I make no laws," said Louis, "I just live. Everything's right to me. I never blister after things like my father did, and like all these men around do. What's the good? Not a bit. You can't have a thing by wantin' it; but you can have what ain't yours by *enjoyin' it.*"

He jumped up to put some more wood on the fire, and then went to pluck the bird. Silvia wandered around the outskirts of the camping-ground; and as he watched her, stealing about in the shadows, a little joy arose in his heart and beat away to a merry tune. How he had loved to be listened to! The first woman who had ever listened to his words!

"It come awful easy," said Louis, as he plucked away, "suppose my father was handy of tongue with the ladies, and his father before that, so I don't need practice. How I did oil it off, to be sure! I wonder what Bill Din would have thought of me!"

Away went the feathers on the delicious evening air, not so delicate nor so gossamer as Louis Buttress's dreams!

And the evening crept on, and he said to himself: "The Almighty, seeing I was a lonely man, put this sweet creature into my charge, to cheer me with the trust implied. And now before the dew falls, I'll make up that tent!"

This done, and Silvia's night couch arranged, the girl said good-evening, and left him.

"Where are you sleeping?" was her last remark. "I feel kinder eerie, and you must be where I can call."

"The buggy seat," said Louis, pointing with the whip.

"Good-night!" she called, "we've got a nice

roof, Mr. Buttress, and fine glitter on it, with all them stars. We won't forget this will we?"

"No," said Louis.

She had gone, and he was left on guard.

"We won't forget this," he said to himself.

The owls hooted, there were creeping things below, and fluttering things above. There was life all round, and it was all very friendly to the two strangers lodged there. Louis knew the wood's occupants were friendly. It entered into his soul to feel it.

"Never forget it," he said to himself.

So he watched all night, and saw beautiful changes around him; but still the feathers of fancy flew from his awakened brain. What beautiful airy feathers they were!

CHAPTER IX

THE HUNTER'S SURPRISE

BREAKFAST was a great success from the material point of view. The bird was fried to a turn, the coffee was fragrant, and the huckleberries, fried in the fat, were sweet and nutty. The air was as clear as crystal, the smoke from their fire curling up in spiral waves, unbroken by wind. Still it was not like the supper.

Silvia was quiet, and Louis was grave.

"How far have we to go yet?" she asked.

"The town will be reached in the afternoon—only about twelve miles to the junction."

"I wish I was going back to Ari-wa-kis," said she.

"I'll take you back," said Louis.

"It ain't a bit o' use, Mr. Buttress. Life's got

to be faced. I ain't goin' to play soft. Where will you leave me?"

"Where you wish."

"At the depot?"

"Sure—if you ain't afraid of the folks a'seein' you with an old rag like me."

"You're makin' a big mistake to talk so about yourself, Mr. Buttress. It ain't good for you. Don't you do it again. Think o' this—people's goin' to believe what you say. Everybody believes what you say, Mr. Buttress, you say things so natural; so don't lead 'em astray, callin' yourself off as a nobody."

"You think I'm a somebody, do you?" inquired Buttress.

"Course!"

"That's somethin' to consider on the lonesome fall nights."

"You ain't never lonesome, are you?" inquired Silvia.

"I have my off days, though I'm mostly of a quiet contentment without any fancy

work to adorn it. But my off days come in."

"Mine'll all be off days, gettin' about in a silly old town, with folks a'danderin' round in the latest costumes. I'll stick to the learning. Come, Mr. Buttress, look about you, we'd best be going."

"So we had," said Louis, "so we had."

Things were packed, and ensconced in the buggy. Miss Lake's box and suitcase were placed on the top, to be ready for lifting out; and the time had come to leave the grove.

"It looks a shame to go away," said Silvia. "I could a'put in a good month here, playin' around amongst the woods and things."

"Same could I," said Buttress.

"Your royalty's limited, you see," said Silvia, as she put her foot on the buggy step. "There's something you can't do, though you are Mr. Buttress, Master Hunter."

"Then it's best to do the other things," said Louis, following her, "and then you feel masterly."

And so they said good-bye to the wooded shelter, and the morning was spent in careful driving, but very little talking. At length the road began to travel downwards, and they came upon an ugly and steep descent.

Silvia held her hat on her head. Buttress was not so sure that it needed this help. He had an indistinct feeling that the girl's eyes were blind with tears.

Some magpies wheeled over their heads.

"That's unlucky," said she.

"No, it ain't," said Louis; "not in our family. Father said that mother and him had the few turns of good fortune as was ever given to them, after seein' and talkin' about a cluster of magpies. Now that's a real good sign. I'll go and see Bill Din when I get landed back——"

"Don't, don't!" she said. "Don't talk of the other side—I ain't gotten much pluck this mornin'."

"Sure! I'm clumsy as an old rhinoceros. I sure wish you were with a better man."

"The man's all right," said Silvia; "it's the new life that's all wrong, Mr. Buttress!"

She looked into his face as she spoke, and the imploring expression of her eyes, as they scanned him through and through, produced a surprising moment in the hunter's life. He had felt throbs of pity for innocent deaths in the forest; but the desire that arose in him now was like a moving, living being, shouting for the girl's liberation.

The left hand which was free from the reins came down on her wrist, and held it like a vise: "Come back with me," he said.

"Where to?" she asked.

"Home," he said.

As he uttered the word which had never fallen from his lips since his father's death, the hunter started violently, as if he had been shot.

"What's the matter?" cried Silvia.

"What?" he cried. "What? A—I don't know how to say it—what a darned idiot I am—words get out so—wal', Ari-wa-kis ain't closed, it's yours still!"

"Father's gone—that was home," said Silvia.

Louis nodded and gulped down some further efforts of speech, and for the rest of the way there was silence.

The depot's clanging and clicking, the screaming of its moving trucks, the ringing of an engine bell, prepared the girl for the end. She began fastening another button of her glove, and rearranging the veil which Bill had tied so carefully on the morning of the journey.

Louis looked askance. Every moment was heavy as lead.

He saw that the girl was pale, and that her lips twitched in her effort to sustain a calm demeanour. He could not speak, and he spent the time thinking over and over again: "What shall I say? What shall I do?"

The train rolled in, and the two figures made for the rear car.

Buttress put the luggage on board, and got off again. The car conductor, seeing a pretty girl,

was ready with his helping arm, far readier than the slow Louis; then Silvia, put on board by the train pilot, returned to the door, and descended a step.

"Mr. Buttress," she called.

He was standing like an image on the rails, but moved at her word and blinked his eyes.

She leaned down, to reach some nearer place than the car allowed her, and said to him:

"I ain't a bit polite, and what you've done for me goes beyond thanks. I said the world was hollow last night, but I reckon I've found some good kernels in Ari-wa-kis."

He waved his hand, for the train was starting, and he vividly remembered the last time he had done it. It all came back as he waved, and he thought that her smile deepened, until she looked glad and happy.

"She makes me live," he muttered. "I don't know that I ever breathed till she I saw—down on the south side of Ari-wa-kis—beautiful and true, and true to life."

CHAPTER X

BILL AND LOUIS

DIN, having seen smoke from the hunter's chimney, hardly allowed the fire to warm the room before he was there.

He found Louis sitting on the wood-box peeling an apple.

The contents of the journey's needs were strewn all over the room. The smell of acrid smoke was so pungent that it caused the eyes to smart. Bill's hunting hat was on the table, and the bag of apples at Buttress's feet showed that he was sampling some fruit, for the purposes of the fruit-grower.

"Take an apple," said Louis.

Din picked one carefully from the huddled heap, and sitting on the table as near the hunter as possible, he began as carefully to peel the apple.

"Where did you get hold of *this* wonder?" he inquired.

"In a wood. A bird's dropped the seed I should think; ain't it mellow and sweet? I'll have that in the orchard, if I can manage it."

"You've washed yourself this mornin'," said Din.

"So I have," said Louis.

"It's all over now, Louis."

"I've taken her," said the hunter.

"Do it in a day?"

"She got the Chicago, due in three o'clock."

"That was racin' it."

"She wished it."

"Good for you," said Din approvingly.

Louis got up from the wood-box and filled his kettle. The two dogs, Simon and Testy, were making friends; for Bill had brought Miss Lake's favourite at his pony's heels, and the animal had followed him into the kitchen.

"Them dogs will fit all right," said Louis. "I'll have no trouble with 'em, they're above suspicion."

"I'll keep Simon," said Din.

"She tol' me to," said Louis.

Din got up and came close to the hunter.

"Your blood's cool," he said; "there's nothing to hinder my keeping him. When she comes back I'll tell her I took him, 'cos you was understandin', and knew how I felt that I must have him."

"That won't do," said Louis, "I said I'd take care of the dog, an' I will!"

"What do you call *that* feeling?" inquired Din.

"Don't know," said Louis.

"Wal', I call it part of the darned cruelty of the hunter. *You* don't want to have it around because of her, but in a fit of blazin' stubborn hardness, you'll stick to the dog, 'cos *she*, only wantin' the dog to be happy, named him off to *you!*"

"You've got Star," said Louis.

"You've got Star," cried Din. "I like to hear that from you, Louis. Star was given to her by me, and I bought her in. The dog's far nearer to her than the horse."

Louis began to whistle. The tune was: *When I was Bound Apprentice in Famous Lincolnshire.* He hummed it well.

"You're gettin' musical," said Din; "there's a Choral Society in town, with a genteel professor in 'doh-ra-mey.' Ain't you goin' to swell the Thanksgiving Festival? Practices have begun already. What with a washed face, and the pride of being guide to the best lady in U. S. A., you'll be at the top of the cream!"

A dull red spread over Louis's face. The blue eyes moved uneasily, and with evident pain behind them. He threw down the saucepan he had taken up: "Din!" he said appealingly.

The young man came off the table, waiting for the next word.

Louis struggled with some emotion, which appeared beyond his management; but finally he got out three words:

"Take the dog!"

Din hung his head. "I'm a blasted imperious devil," he said, "and you know it, Louis,—well

you know it! Darn me if I'll take Simon. You shall have him, she gave him to you; only Louis, for God's sake think of it—of what this awful love means. Do you think it improves any man, to feel that if someone has any advantage with the girl he worships, he's like to strangle him out of the way?"

"It's awful," said Louis.

"It's more than that, Louis. Take my tip. Don't you soften from that happy hunting life of yours; don't wash your face, or you may have to wash your heart. Louis, that's you, an innocent, good friend like you, that got my ironical bitterness up! What do you think I've felt for—Sheridan—and even Spen?"

And the young man turned away in a fit of terrible bitterness.

Louis looked at him, with eyes that opened wider in sensitive appreciation of suffering.

"It's queer," he said, "mortally queer."

No word came from Din, so after a minute the hunter added: "She liked the way you packed the

basket—she knew it wasn't a fumblin' ole stick like me.”

Din turned round; and into his hard, grey eyes there swept a heavenly moisture of salt. It relieved the air. He rolled his eyes to the ceiling, he smiled, he threw up the knife and caught it in his hand.

“You're handsome, Buttress. If folks only knew what makes people good lookin' there'd be more of 'em in church. You're better than a bishop to me. Louis, I'll tell you of—never mind, there ain't a need for talk; but we'll eat together, like brothers, will we? Will you break bread with me?”

So two men sat eating bread and meat together, and there was peace in the air; but when Bill got up to go, he left Simon behind him.

CHAPTER XI

SILVIA'S LETTER

"DON'T stand at the door, Din," said Buttress.

It was evening, and although it was dusk, it was plain to see that Bill Din was in a furious temper. He carried some letters in his hand.

"Don't stand at the door, Din," said Buttress, again.

He waved him in with his arm, and slowly as if he were blind, Bill came into the kitchen. He brought the smell of the damp earth, for he had ridden five miles from the town, with the night dews already moistening the hollows. He brought something else besides the damp earth on his shoes, and a moth or two, and some leaves and grass.

Louis felt that it was a very cold night.

"Shut the door, Din," he said.

It was flung back with a bang. Simon, who was friendly with the pony boy, rose up and came to him, but on getting near him and sniffing, the dog walked back to the hunter, eyeing the visitor shrewdly with his blue-green eyes.

"You can have supper with me," said Louis.

Bill shook his head and began sorting out the letters he held in his hand.

"I brought *your* mail along of mine," he said.

"Oh!" said Louis.

The mail was put down, one by one.

"Spect I'll hear from Kink in Chicago," said Louis, "I wrote him to catalogue prices for me. The Kansas City man does the main buying from me, but I asked Kink for information."

Din had laid down two letters, and the third was in his hand. He turned it over and over in his fingers, and would not lay it down.

Louis looked at him in surprise, and Din said suddenly: "There's a letter for you—from Miss Lake."

Louis was on his feet in a minute.

"A letter—for me?"

"For you," said Din, still holding it.

"A letter," cried Louis. "Ain't that fine? Sure, I'm pleased! Me? Give it me, Din."

"Look here," said Din, holding the letter high above his head; "you'll read this aloud to me, *you will!*"

"That's a threat," said Louis. "I don't like it."

"Then it goes into the fire," said Bill.

"No, it doesn't," said Louis. "I'm a mild man, but I'm a strong one. Come out o' that, Bill Din, and hand me my own mail. You forget your feeling for Miss Lake. You own to being partial to her and now you'll burn her mail."

"No, I'll not burn her mail," said Din, "she shall write to whom she likes. That was a trick on my part to see what you'd say, Buttress. But there it is! You're as keen as me about it!"

He threw it to the hunter, who caught it skilfully, and put it in his over-all pocket.

"Read it, and tell me how she is."

"No," said Louis, "that's the first and the last and the final of it. I'm in no mood to read anythin'."

Din got up and went to the door, for in America the dusk has no sooner come and it is gone. Darkness had fallen in these few minutes; and when the door was reopened, Star was heard to whinny.

"Is that poor beast out in the cold?" said Louis. "You'd keep her tied up to a fence for an hour or two while you let your passions overhaul you. Gee! I'd be ashamed to be run by my moods!"

"Better," cried Din, "better ten millions of times to be run by moods than to have none to quench—that's all you are, Louis—that's all! You get everything that a human creature could want, and you feel it all in a see-saw, treadmill sort of way. You'll keep that letter in your pocket till you've done your night's huntin', and written to your old fur merchants in Chicago and Kansas. And then you'll read it and—and—wonder why

she's written—and give one o' your easy smiles, and throw it in the fire."

The room was too dark for Din to see that Louis was trembling with excitement. His voice quivered slightly as he said, "Will I, Bill Din?"

"Unless," said Din, "you've changed and have been deceivin' me, and Miss Lake's turned your nature out o' its course?"

There was no answer to this, and Din waited for one, straining his ears in the darkness. Then, with a gasp of rage, he banged the door and went after the pony.

Louis remained listening, until he heard Star's trot, trot, out of the yard. Then, with eager fingers, he lit the oil lamp, which was bracketed near the door, and taking it from the shelf, placed it on the kitchen table. He was humming softly to himself, as he placed the light and brought out the letter.

"Now for it," he said; "them silly ole passion fools can wag their heads, until good Doomsday,

but I'll sure enjoy the letter that this good girl has written to me."

He cut the envelope with a pen-knife and opened the page with reverent care: "In the main it looks much like Kink's handwritin'," he said, "but I expect she'll put things on another footing than Kink."

And he began to read.

DEAR MR. BUTTRESS ("Same as Kink," said Louis, "no different.")

I have written to tell you that I am caught right into the bustle of city life and feel kinder choked for some pure air, and less manners. You may think this queer of me, but I told you I was some like your dear old father who would go to prison to be free of his rights. You see if folks consider style to the furthest limit, it is sure going to put out freedom! But as Bill Din would say, "I'll stick it out—for pure cussedness." And I mean that I am enjoying the books, though it is hard, and I feel kinder languid on these fall days. I look at the blue sky and *think* of the woods, and I feel a passion rise in me to go back on the minute, but no, my good angel says to me: "Stick it out" and "you will get woods *double* when you do go back." I sure had to write to get over a blue spell, which I found myself wrapped in, when I came out of college this

afternoon. I thought of you and I felt you would know all about the feelings.

Yours, with deep respect to your Majesty
The King of the Woods,
SILVIA LAKE.

"Sure! What a wag she is!" cried Louis.
"She ends good and spirited, a'tracing back on the old scent of our first tracks together. A kinder welcome treat for an ole wild hunter!"

And he put the letter back in the envelope, and placed it in the bracket, with some other dusty business letters.

But whether it was an excellent memory, or that the letter held the man, certain it is that in a day or two Buttress could repeat the whole of it, from beginning to end, and used to do it, as he hunted and fished. Once or twice he lost the trail, through a rambling thought after Silvester Lake's daughter. He blamed his rod, the gun, or the turn in the woods. Sometimes he blamed nature's defences; but he never blamed the woman.

CHAPTER XII

THE HUNTER AWAKES

COMING out of the spell of his hunting adventures, Louis was tackling a new problem.

"I can make good money, and I've got brains. Why can't I advance? Mother would say 'to the better classes'—father must have been aggravating to mother. He was sure a pleasure-loving individual—sure am I!"

And without being aware of it, Buttress was altering his life. Cleaning things, eating with more care, mending his clothes, saving his money—the hardness of it did him good—as a cold bath awakens the drunkard's wits.

Louis slept better, for there was something to live for when he got up, so he went to bed much more tired. He lost the rheumatic pain, which

had been constantly in his joints for the last five years, and he moved quicker and more easily about his work.

"My rheumatiz was lazy man's pain," he said one day. "Seems I've just awakened in time. Justice sits as tight as—as corn on a cob."

Then one day in winter, when everything around the log hut was glittering with diamond lights, for the sun was shining on snow which was as compact as salt, and when the pine trees held their white chunks firm, through the heat of the day, a sense of huge inspiration arose in the man.

He had come in with some game, and had stood at the door, looking west. The afternoon was drawing to a close, and the silent beauty of the untrodden woods, in their white carpet, now turning gold in the sun, again violet in the shadows—excited some deeper sense of his whole life.

What did his life mean to him?

"I'm sure happy," he said, "learnin' more every day, and what she said about books helpin' common life is gospel true. To wash my face was once

a burden—now I kinder like it. The Almighty's liftin' me out o' the rough!"

He stepped farther from his door, and saw the stains of the red sun, in orange and flame colour, upon the banks of snow leading to the forest. He saw Ari-wa-kis, green and frozen in the hollow; and, as he looked, a warm radiance stole all about the hunter's heart; and he said:

"She it was that made me *uncommon* glad. I was always a happy man, but from then I date *uncommon* gladness. I seen then that there was more to follow—we ain't goin' to git shute o' life with dying."

Louis glanced once more at Ari-wa-kis, and then returned to his kitchen.

It was exceedingly bare.

It was empty.

It was empty as the shells near a squirrel's nest!

He smiled faintly, and then his heart beat-like a hammer, and said to him:

"Have her yourself, bring her home—make her yours."

Just that and nothing more.

The hunter could hardly grasp the daring leap his heart had made. But the heart, having reached the brain, went on again:

"Do it! You can do it easy. They all want her—Bill Din—Spen—they all want her. Better and better! Sport here! We'll see! The hunt lies before the hunter."

He threw the game on a chair, and went to replenish the fire.

"The hunt lies before the hunter," he said again.

And then, as he worked and moved about the kitchen:

"What did my father say? 'Louis, a man knows he'll have the game he wants—he sees the way—he knows the creature—he sympathizes till he knows the track she takes. She's his before he's got her, 'cos he's learned her till she's his.'"

"That's why poachin's right," said Buttress, quoting his father again. "That was game, of course. Now it's a different matter. The

woman. Still—there's a lot o' knowledge in the hunt!"

And then Louis went as far as the thought of the capture; and drew within himself:

"She's a sporting creature, free of the wild like the deer, or the 'cute, little foxes—she don't want capturin'."

And when Louis had got his kettle singing and had fed his chickens, he was saying:

"Captured by true love, her freedom would be complete."

And he said this over and over again, and became madly happy, and wondered what he should do first.

"Wal', in good hunting, when the difficulties are steep, see first that the gear's all right. That's the ticket. I'll sure go through the mill, makin' myself fit for the woman. I'll be everything I ought to be."

And that night, which was a Friday, the first week in December, Buttress replied to the letter received in September:

DEAR MISS LAKE,

Your kind words received and stored up. Am learning some like you. Found some verse that sure spells you. Think it goes elegant, and my father said it off, on winter nights, to pass the time away; so when I found it in an old book I made a copy for the lady:

Queen and Huntress, chaste and fair,
 Now the sun is laid to sleep
 Seated in thy silver chair
 State in wonted manner keep.
 Hesperus entreats thy light
 Goddess excellently bright.

Earth, let not thy envious shade
 Dare itself to interpose.
 Cynthia's shining orb was made
 Heaven to clear when day did close;
 Bless us then with wished sight,
 Goddess excellently bright.

Lay thy bow of pearl apart,
 And thy crystal shining quiver;
 Give unto the flying hart
 Space to breathe, how short soever.
 Thou who makst a day of night,
 Goddess excellently bright.

They call the writer Ben Jonson, and I sure wish that I could lay it to,

LOUIS BUTTRESS.

The letter was sent away next morning to Chicago, where Silvia Lake was now living; and Buttress's life went forward with a will. And he cared no more for Bill Din's absence; but when he met the man on Christmas Eve, in the town, high above Ari-wa-kis and the woods, they looked hard at one another.

"I'm sorry," said Bill. "Will you forgive me, Louis?"

"Never held anythin' to forgive," said Louis. "Man's nature has its ups and downs, and I don't blame you—feelin' some like yourself these days."

Bill Din did not take this remark seriously.

"I'm blamed foolish," he said; "you ain't the man to think o' these things, and I'm hittin' you for nothin'."

Buttress put his hand on Bill's shoulder.

"So far the thought's been absent from me, Bill; but the way you monkeyed round me, with your jealous feelin's, why it's set me on the track. Can't escape it now. Count me an enemy from to-day. I'm in the hunt."

And Din, walking away, knew that he had deserved it; and knew that Buttress spoke fair.

"But he ain't got a chance," he said, "if he thinks a woman of the type of Miss Lake can be hunted to be won, he's beaten out at the start."

CHAPTER XIII

A BAD WORLD

NEVERTHELESS, when Buttress was left alone, he found that it was one of his "off days."

"Who would have thought it was Bill Din talkin'," he muttered. "Mysterious to think that a young woman with a fine high-born nature is causin' these men to show themselves like grizzlies, and bears, and tigers, and wild cats. 'Pon my word, I'd rather have the grizzlies and bears! The woman would be shocked if she knew. Life's a great mystery."

The next morning Buttress went hunting, and was expeditious and skilful over the work. It was often his way to waste material that came into his hand; but everything he did went to the right

market, from now onwards. He wrote to a fur merchant living in Kansas City, and arranged to supply the man with certain furs. He was careful of everything; and soon he was collecting money in a big china vase which had come from Lincolnshire with his father and mother. And he washed himself once a day.

He sang through all his work, and was light-hearted and happy. "O, 'tis my delight on a moonlight night, in the season of the year," was whistled and hummed more than it had ever been done before. And on moonlight nights, when Louis took his gun, and made tracks for the wild, a wonderful airy feathery vision floated in front of him, bathing the moon in gossamer light, steeping the landscape in poetry, and turning Ari-wa-kis lake into a vision of beauty.

The best dreams have no edge to them, that was why Louis was so happy, for there was no definite plan, only a widening happiness, a joy that had sprung up in the desert. "Never to sleep again," he thought.

And so he gave himself endless pleasure, in the mere contemplation of the small adventure.

One day, when he was busy skinning a coon, Spen came in, without knocking. He began walking about the room.

"You'll have missed me," he said, "I used to come reg'lar, didn't I, when Miss Lake was at Ari-wa-kis? But there don't seem nothin' to come and talk about now, someway. Seen her off all right, did you?"

"Saw her aboard the car," said Louis.

Spen laughed: "I'm picturin' it," he said; "there's a man a'comin' to see you one of these days—Sheridan."

"What's he want with me?" inquired Louis.

"A talk. He's curious to see you. I bet he just wants to know why Miss Lake wanted you to take her across the desert. She refused a minister for you."

Louis, who remembered the stories of the vicar in Lincolnshire, known to his mother and father, was astonished with this news.

"A real vicar?" he asked.

"St. Saviour's," said the young man.

There was silence again; and Spen, wandering around once more, upset the china vase, and sent the money spinning.

"Gettin' rich," he said, as he picked up the many pieces. "Funny of you, Louis. What'll you do with it?"

"I'm thinkin' of bankin'."

A peal of laughter from Spen was the answer to this information, and it was followed by a quick question: "Ain't you changed some way? What you done to yourself, Buttress?"

Louis continued his work, and Spen said:

"Course you'll be changed, you've mixed in the world, now you know what it is. Well, I'll warn you of one thing, be careful what you say about Miss Lake before Jack Sheridan."

"I'm never careful about anything," said Louis, "so now you know. You can tell Sheridan if you like. Care? What do I care for men's madness?"

"Not till it's your own!" said Spen.

"Then leave it," said Louis, "till you see I'm mad. I'm sane enough at present."

Spen got up and went out.

The same afternoon Sheridan arrived, knocking carefully at the door.

Louis opened it, and looked out in a gingerly way.

"I've seen you, Buttress, many a time; but you keep out of the world, and it is difficult to lay hands on you. Do you mind me coming in?"

"Just as you like," said Louis.

He turned into the house, followed by the Englishman, who, after looking about for awhile, sat down on the wood-box. Louis went to the table, and continued his work.

The light in the room was not good, for the window was dim from many storms of rain and mud. Louis changed his position several times, but remained standing. Meantime, Sheridan, sitting on the wood-box, kept his eyes on the ground for a while, then broke out suddenly:

. "You're the sensible man, living out of Ala-

manca. Alamanca's a bad place. The world's a very bad place, Buttress. A very bad place, Buttress!" he continued. "The longer I live, the worse I think of it! It takes some living to find it all out, but I have found it out, and I warn you—the world's a very bad place!"

"All right," said Louis. "I'll take notice of what you say."

"You're wise, Buttress, you're wiser than Solomon by ten thousand advances! Do you read much?"

Louis dropped his work, and his eyes grew dull as he spoke:

"I read none. I'm a poor scholar."

"That's a bad admission for a man to make. You want to read more, study more, reach out more. I'd be ashamed, Buttress, to own to ignorance, I'm sorry for you, I pity you, but I'll hold out the helping hand—will you have the use of my library as often as you like, and for as long as you like? I'm a restless man—I'm away for the day or the week—but I'll give you a key to my room,

and you can go in and out as you please. Will you do it?"

Louis stopped working. The afternoon was waning, and it was a little difficult to see Sheridan's face, but the brown eyes of the man shone out of the darkness, with a look which was persuasive.

"I'm wantin' knowledge," said Louis, "more'n I ever wanted it up till now! I want a run of some books. But I can't see why you should think o' me? What made you think o' me?"

"You never mix yourself up with what doesn't concern you. I'd give every single thing I possess to stand clear of Alamanca, as you do!"

"I'd get out of it, then," said Louis.

Sheridan looked around the room in a considering way. "I may do so. I don't like it. Then, tell me, will you use my library? Will you try to get somewhere?"

Buttress put his hand to his chin and rubbed it with his fingers. He looked out of the dimmed windows to the sky, with its sunset tinges.

Sheridan's eyes were still upon his face.

"I'm not sayin' much," said Louis, "but I'm thinkin'—now you'll have had great advantages. You might say that you already stand in advance of a man like me, by years of education. 'Tain't ever likely I'll come anywhere near gettin' up to you——"

"Of a sort," interrupted Sheridan, throwing back his head.

"You're a scholar. You can pen things beautifully. My father would call it 'inditing.' You can have thoughts in your brain that I ain't able to even dream of——"

"Buttress!" said Sheridan.

Louis stared at him.

"What have I done?" cried the hunter.

"Nothing at all, Buttress. I merely stopped you short because you—ah, well, it all comes to the same thing—I'm at daggers drawn with the world and my fellow creatures—and I'm twenty-eight, would you think it? Only twenty-eight. And I haven't a scrap of faith! I'm in rags and ashes, and I've come to you more like a beg-

gar, Buttress, to say, May I—may I be your friend?"

Buttress came over to him, and put his hand on his shoulder: "Course we'll be friends. I ain't able to fathom your bitterness, but it's a real bad sort, I can see—real as hell. I remember once hearin' a poor man talk like you—I sure pitied him! He'd got it real bad. Come to think of it, the poor fellow had done somethin' he shouldn't a'done—that makes a lot of folks miserable! Course a man who studies and thinks and knows all you do, he's kinder safe from a lot o' badness. This fellow was a no-account man like myself, but bein' not so happy natured as me, his slackness did for him!"

"He got on the rocks, did he?" asked Sheridan.
"How did he end?"

"Pretty good I think—he pulled through, some-way, though I ain't heard of him for more'n ten years. Wal', I call your visit to-day kinder providential. It's all in a piece with the considera-tions of my mind. I've been an indifferent living

man up till now. Give me a gun, and the open air, and I ain't had a wish beyond it, but somethin's come into my mind of late, and I've wakened up, and I own I'm wantin' books pretty bad, and I'll be real glad of your direction."

Sheridan got up and went to the door, opened it, re-shut it, and stood with his back to it. "Together we'll pull it off, Buttress—I'm sure of it. I've had my eyes skinned in Alamanca Creek and I'm equal to dealing with them!"

"What's that?" asked Buttress. "Pull what off?"

"You," said Sheridan. "We'll make you top of the cream!"

And opening the door of the cabin, the Englishman went out to his horse.

Louis Buttress stood thinking.

"A rum world," he said to himself. "There's wheels within wheels. That man ain't right, though he's had his chance, a good chance to know things, I should say! Seems like as if he don't know the A B C of things. Now there's a trail

lost there, by which he misses his game. And he's got what I ain't got, but it don't work right some-way. It's been laid out wrong, so it's no use!"

Louis was so engrossed with his thoughts that the dogs licked him in vain.

"They ain't started right with that man. Poor fellow," he said.

CHAPTER XIV

SILVIA'S SECOND LETTER

BUTTRESS awaked one morning in December to find that his left shoulder blade was very obtrusive—that is to say, a sharp stab reminded him every now and again that he had once had an attack of muscular rheumatism.

"Drat it!" said Louis.

He next proceeded to light the fire in the stove, coming to the conclusion, by the agony in his fingers, that the fire ought to have been kept up all night.

"Forty below zero," he muttered.

The fire was thawing the near neighbourhood, when the kettle took a lively turn, and slipped awkwardly in his stiff fingers. A moment later the fire was out.

"Now if it had been boiling summer," said Louis, "and I'd a'wanted to put out my fire, that ole kettle would have contrived to stand up."

It took him half an hour to relight the wood, which he had to soak with kerosene.

He went out for pine, and "brought the cones to warm things up faster"; and at about nine o'clock the room was thawed out, while his breakfast was smoking on the stove.

Louis next went to the enamelled tin, where he was wont to wash himself; but finding that the soft water was frozen, he looked at the tub, and back at the tin, and remarked:

"Can't do it—ain't a bit o' use—why should I wash?"

Nobody answered this question; only the two dogs, Simon and Testy, who had been shut up over-night for fear of their coming in contact with a prowling skunk, lately making raids on Louis's chickens, started howling at the top of their voices, and with another "drat it," Louis went off to their rescue.

They returned with him to the house, looking like two mollified children, who, after being very badly treated, are given the liberty they ought to have had long since. Buttress took hold of his gun, and began playing with it.

He discovered something wrong with the mechanism, and decided to go to Alamanca to get it put to rights.

The day was still in a state of deadly frost. Everything was uniformly grey and dull and quiet, but within all, like the spirit of certain quiet-spoken people, there was a frost that could annihilate life.

The ride into town was accomplished quickly, and Louis was soon cantering back again with the dogs at his heels.

A man who met him just outside Alamanca, as the ridge was descending into the lower land, called out: "What's the matter, Buttress?"

"Why, now?" asked Buttress, turning round in the saddle, for the man had already passed by.

"You don't look same as you've looked lately."

"Rheumatiz," said Louis, and went riding away towards Ari-wa-kis.

"I'll have a pull at the oil bottle, when I git back," said Louis. "I'll soak a flannel, and put it on good and warm."

When he had made up his fire again and emptied his sack, which contained the purchases in town, he sat down to look over them. There was a new piece of harness, which took up a long time; and then he turned over the letters. One had the Chicago postmark, and he wondered he had not noticed it when the man handed out the bundle.

"Miss Lake," he said, softly.

The bluish pallor of his face thawed out under the change of thought, and he looked long at the envelope.

"I never washed myself to-day," he said suddenly.

He jumped up, and went for the despised tin, got some soft water from the kettle, broke the ice on the top of the tub, and brought the water to a lukewarm heat. He plunged his face into the

refreshing liquid, and soon was rubbing away with a towel, water trickling from hair and ears. He felt better for the effort. He returned to the table and opened his letter.

He was right, for Miss Lake had answered his letter.

DEAR MR. BUTTRESS,

Did you write that poem out, or did some one tell you to do it? When I saw your name at the close of the page, I said to myself, "I'll hear some about Ari-wa-kis." Then I read that old, old poem of Jonson's, written to the goddess Diana, and as far away from dear old Ari-wa-kis as England, and I felt sure grieved. Where is your kingdom, Master Hunter? Have you lost it? Ah, you are like all these boys of to-day, who cannot say a word for themselves, but are always saying and doing what others have done? I'm sure disappointed.

Yours in regret,

SILVIA LAKE.

Louis read the letter twice, and then looked quickly about him.

"I wish I'd a pair of glasses," he said, "I might see clearer what she says."

He took the letter up again, and read it through

more slowly, drinking in the full import of the words; and then he took it to the stove and threw it in the ash-pan.

"It's best there," he said, "it ain't a'goin' to do me a bit of good, so it's best there where I can't think of it."

Having destroyed it he went across to the new harness, and began to play with it, the dogs helping him by coming around his legs, and licking his hands as they got a chance for it; but even then, Louis knew quite well, that though the letter was burned, every word of it was written like fire in his heart, and was coming up before his mental eyes, like something that was alive to torture him in future days. He bore it in silence for two solid hours, and then he flung the harness from him, and tramped to the door, and threw it wide open.

"Yes, my boys," he said to the dogs, "yes, my good ole sports, we'll be great together this winter, we will, we will!"

And the dogs bounded about him, and Louis, setting to work to prepare his sled for a run to a

hut where he dried skins, was saying to himself: “Din tol’ me what it felt like, and I was darned hard with him. ‘Go huntin’,’ I said; I remember I said it, and as I said it, somethin’ kinder tol’ me I was beyond myself! I hope Bill Din will get her, and I hope he will—and I want her mightily myself, and she’s given me the mitten, and I’m dratted ignorant and ain’t able to say, ‘when a woman does this she means that’ same as my father knew all too well, through my mother holding so many years of knowledge round his life. And there’s Spen knows the women generally to a great height of skill, but he don’t know the ones in particular. And there’s Sheridan, Din said Sheridan was once in favour, and is now out of it. Well, so was I. I was once in favour, highly in favour. Who but me took her to the Junction? This means—what does this mean?”

And Louis brought the fur rug out and piled it into the sled, saying again: “I should never have come out o’ my shell, didn’t Spen tell me to stay where I was? Didn’t poor ole Din beg of me,

with feeling in his voice, to stop a'washing of my face, lest I had to wash my heart? I'll wash neither heart nor face for any woman—not for any woman—it's not good enough."

And then, suddenly, Buttress felt that someone was near him, and looking round saw Sheridan.

"I've brought you some books," cried the Englishman.

He was looking at Louis intently, and in the best bit of light the day had yet shown.

"What did you do that for?" inquired the hunter, sullenly.

"Never saw you look more ready for work," said Sheridan. "You see, Buttress, when you're getting ready for sport, or whatever you're doing, you do it with full force."

"Will you go with me?" said Louis suddenly.

Sheridan was so glad of the offer that he never asked where they were bound for, and two men who had felt the pinch of circumstances, which a careless life often leads to, found themselves journeying through the woods in a silent harmony.

CHAPTER XV

“TRY YOUR LUCK”

SILENCE is sometimes the best introducer of a companionship for life. A good silence at the right moment tells so strongly in favour of a good understanding.

The journey through the woods was undertaken in silence. Spen's loquacity would have fretted the whole way, and Bill Din would have had violent exclamations during the changes of the road. But these two men found themselves equal to the long pause in speech.

The hut reached, Buttress asked Sheridan if he would care to stay the night, and the offer accepted, the hunter began to prepare supper, after lighting a large wood fire. The horse was put up next door to them, and Louis made their small

living-room warmer than his own home; for the vicinity of the big trees sheltered the men from the fierce north-east blast, and made it easier to do it. There was fried pork and hot coffee for supper, taken in a dim light, at about five o'clock, with a fearful frost striking up on the windows. The light from the stove and the lantern gave chequered glimmers over the wooden walls of the building, and the dogs, delighted with the men's company, hovered round and round them. Through the rough little windows, with their swollen glass with notches in it, they could see odd glimpses of a hob-goblin moon, and some sheen of stars. To open the door was to feel a cold cutting in, which took out a warm slice from the kitchen, leaving winter in its place.

Buttress got to some work, sitting on a stump of wood. Sheridan, throwing his fur coat on the floor, lay down on it.

Now Louis Buttress, once at work, was an intent sort of man. Yet he could follow, and had followed, the long monologues of Spen, and the truer

stories told by Bill Din, for hours and hours at a time. He was something of a wedding guest to an ancient mariner, and men were fond of confiding in one who was absolutely safe, and thoroughly interested in them. But for once in his life, Louis Buttress was too busy with his own thoughts to follow the mind of another man.

"If you've brought books for me to study, you can take 'em back!" he said. "I don't want 'em! I've made up my mind to stay where I am."

"What's that for?"

"For the love of the work! I've been in a back-water all my life, and it's been good enough to give me satisfaction. You said one day that the world was a bad place—wal', may be it is—it's good enough in this cabin, and on the shores of Ari-wa-kis, and it's been good enough to satisfy me until now. Why should I come out of all this satisfaction to get sick o' life, like you seem to be, and like Spen talks? Why should I? No, I'll not do it. I'll hunt on Ari-wa-kis shores, until I die."

Sheridan got up and began to walk the cabin floor.

"I'm sorry you're talking like this again," he said. "A poor spirit you've got, Buttress, I must say! You could make a good place in the world with a bit of trouble; but you won't cut out the Rip Van Winkle—that's all you are, Buttress, a Rip Van Winkle. And if you'd liked you could have been first in Alamanca Creek, and—and——"

Sheridan stopped talking and went to the window.

Buttress laid down his work and looked at him. The man's head was thrown far back, tilted until the tip of the forehead was about visible.

Louis began to speak in a low measured voice. "What else could I do?" he said. "I could get longing and hoping for far more than was ever meant for me. That's what I could do. I could get thinking of a lady that'll never think of me! And I call it folly, and madness, and weakness. Up till now I ain't been weak, and now I see myself growing weak—a'slidin' into hopes which will dupe

me! I see myself building a castle in the air, or on the sand. Now's the time to give it up, and keep my head——”

“What about her, Buttress? What about the woman? Would you leave a woman to face the world by herself, because you've got no confidence? Is that the man in you! You're half-beaten at the start!”

Sheridan went to the cabin door and looked out into the night. Everything was very still. Some snow, falling from the bough of a tree, gave a soft thud, and there was the faint creaking of a sled, probably a mile away.

“What a night!” he muttered. As he said these words he became lost in thought; but he was awakened out of them by Louis Buttress.

The hunter had stood beside him for some moments and was now looking earnestly into his face.

“You don't follow,” he said. “You ain't been bred and born in ignorance and darkness same as me. Who am I, anyway? What have I learned

and done? Mighty little! I'm a man of no account. You ain't able to feel it. You're amongst the general world, while I'm right out of it. It ain't fair. You've gotten the right start, and I—I was put out by a mighty bad beginning, losing all but the hunting, and having plenty of chances of sport. Nothin' else to take me from it. What have I to give a woman?”

“Buttress, try it! Try your luck. I think you've got something you don't know of.”

The hunter stepped out of the hut and walked a few yards away.

Sheridan was muttering to the dogs, “Get down, you brutes! Get away with you!”

He was lost in thought.

CHAPTER XVI

SPEN GOES TALKING

SPEN'S temper was none of the best. He had been highly delighted with Sheridan's friendship, and had boasted considerably of his friend, the Englishman.

Now Louis supplanted him, had without any difficulty won a position, which reduced Spen to silence for want of an audience. His first idea was to spoil Buttress's feelings by telling him a few truths. So he called on the hunter. Buttress appeared dull and quiet, and without any hesitation Spen plunged into his tale.

"So I hear you are in favour, and are to have the run of Sheridan's library. I wouldn't use it, if he'd offered it twice."

As he got no answer, though he left a dramatic pause, Spen continued:

"Queer fellow, Sheridan, you don't know him. I've sized him up. Seen him through and through. Life's a stage to him—everything in this world too —'cept of course, himself. Have you never noticed how he looks at you, kinder studyin' same as if he was in a play-house. I don't know where the blamed fellow's spent his life, but he's a'sayin', 'Now let's see what's in this heart, sure, it's an interestin' study!' He takes everybody off, and imitates them. He gits them easy and natural, a'showin' of their real natures, and then he has them on exhibition—a free treat, you might say! That's why he was so keen to go to Ari-wa-kis. Silvester Lake sure tickled him—tickled him to death—with his pride and his empty pockets and his empty bigness."

Still, Louis was not to be drawn, so Spen continued:

"Miss Lake was to be another, but it played off like a bad shot there, and Sheridan got hit without meanin' it. Then he took a notion to study me. Gee—he found me interestin'—and I had the run

of the place. But he never saw through *me!* I was too deep for him."

Spen leaned back in the hickory chair, and looked proudly at the hunter.

"I could a'done anythin' with him—then I could—brotherly love and all the rest of it. He used to ask for tales of you—it was sure good to see him, striding across the room like he was going to break up house—that was you in company, see! I couldn't help feelin' that the fellow was darned clever at it. 'Spen,' says he, 'have you ever noticed that the man Buttress is obliged to have his own way? You see he has lived so totally for himself that he is getting his way while we civilized creatures are saying, "if you please" and "thank you." , , , "

"Wal'," said Louis, "that's my way. I'll own up."

"Sure, Buttress! And he says to me, 'Spen, let's start all afresh—we'll stop playing this civilized game. We'll be our real selves—we'll be hogs—we'll be the original thing!' I'm quotin'

him word for word. So you'll be usin' his library, will you? That's sure out o' my line. I'd rather shoot him."

"You wouldn't," said Buttress. "Not you. Wal', you take great pleasure in tellin' me this; but when a man lives by himself, he does get selfish, you bet he does! He don't get mixed up with talk—that's sure a great help. But you think you'll spoil two friends, do you? You go home thinkin' you've driven 'em along the same road, 'cos you have! Sheridan's my friend; and best of it is, he knows me, and still he stays by me."

Spen got up and looked out of the window.

"Bill Din has thirty head of cattle on the south bank of Ari-wa-kis," he said, "that's the boy that gits Miss Lake! She's rented to him—that tells you how the land lies. Wal', I guess you ain't in the mood to believe me?"

"Sure, I do. If you mean about Mr. Sheridan. Don't I know the man? I ain't clever in books, but I know that tigers are tigers, and monkeys are monkeys; and I guess the striped creatures ain't

able to help their stripes. Sheridan looks at life crooked some way! You ain't used to it. I ain't used to it! We're all for thumpin' blows out here; but it's in the man for some reason, and Sheridan's made me think! He's shown the real man to me. I thank the man for showin' me up as a 'good for nothing.' Sheridan's my friend!"

Spen got up.

"Wal', I'll go and see Bill Din, the man who wins."

As Buttress made no answer, Spen went out, and did just what he had said he would do. It was four in the afternoon, but he turned his horse in the direction of Bill Din's ranch.

Bill Din and Toad Lorraine had a big horse ranch seven miles out of Alamanca; and here came the idle Spen in a fit of vexation. Sheridan tired of him, Buttress now his enemy, he felt he must have a truce with the pony boy. The ranch was one of the most attractive places in the neighbourhood, and Spen dearly loved an audience. The young men that gathered nightly in the home of the

horse ranchers were the brightest specimens of the country; and to stand in the midst of a crowd, in the comfort and warmth of Din's living-room and tell tales, well adorned with the flowers of his own imagination—this was a relief to the monotony of life. This was more to Spen than a wife and home. He was a rolling stone, and he gathered no moss. To have a pretence at life was more attractive than life itself.

Din and he had quarrelled, but Spen patched up all his quarrels whenever he chose. He would quarrel with a man one day, keep it going until he was tired of it, and make it up without any effort, to suit his own plans. Men allowed him to do this because they did not treat him seriously.

So Spen rode off to Bill Din's ranch and found time favourable, for Bill was alone in the big kitchen, smoking a pipe and thinking desperately.

"You look as if you were makin' a fortune," said Spen.

Din nearly dropped the pipe, he was so surprised to see his one-time rival.

"Oh, you!" he said; "what d'you want?"

"A seat if I may have one! Sheridan's great with Buttress, now."

"So I heard," said Din.

"Sure! He never wanted Miss Lake—he'll be going back to England to git married—some duchess or royalty lady will be for him. Wal—he's helpin' Buttress all he can, so he can do you out."

"And would have taken Miss Lake himself, if she hadn't objected," said Din. "U. S. A. won't miss him."

"You bet your bottom dollar that there ain't a man in Alamanca will miss him; 'cept that cracked hunter up at Ari-wa-kis, but he ain't gone yet—and he's workin' up Buttress, to do you out!"

Bill stared at Spen.

"Sure! Buttress has been in all his schemes of late. Buttress has the key of his library. He's to go in and out as he pleases. That's true. There's a plot hatchin' there. And I've tumbled to it. Sheridan ain't able to win Miss Lake—(we'll put it that way to please you). Wal—he

hates you and me like poison—specially you! So he puts Louis up to it, as a rival, and sets him to work to educate and make himself presentable—and to do *you* out."

Din laid his pipe down and looked at Spen.

"Goin' to take it sittin' down?" inquired Spen. "Gee! If I'd your chances, I'd rush in like a whirlwind, before that Buttress can make anythin' of his knowledge. See here, Bill Din, there's to be great doin's in Chicago, a great horse fair, and big prizes for the best riders in March. Now I know the ladies and I know what they like—a victorious fellow. You go along and come off with a first prize and let her see you a'doin' it—it'll carry her away by storm!"

"What date in March?"

"Mid March."

"I'll do it, sure. Darn it, that rich oil merchant hits me hardest. I ain't a poor man, but I can't run with an oil merchant."

"He can't put a lock on Silvia Lake! She's a woman's will of her own! You ain't any need to

think of him. Let her know you're comin' and you give her the full chance of seein' your skill, and the way the public loves it. She'll be clappin' you among thousands; and she'll be in the mood to say yes to you."

It was at this moment the door opened and Toad Lorraine entered, followed by two men, so Spen got up to go; and, slowly, but with some show of goodwill, Bill went to the door with him, Lorraine looking back in surprise.

When Spen had mounted his horse, he gazed down at his yesterday's enemy. Bill Din's black hair was shining like a raven's wing in the moonlight. His grey eyes were upon the prairie, where his horses roamed; and as he looked at them, it was easy to see the joy awaking in the young man's expression. It was at the thought of immediate action.

"You'll do it," said Spen, after watching him in silence.

Bill nodded.

"Get your wardrobe dashin', and carry your

usual fine style into all you do! Feel in good order for the pony ridin'?"

"That's done beforehand!" said Bill. "I'll ride a prize out of Chicago, if Miss Lake's a witness. Good-night."

"Good-night!" said Spen, riding off.

CHAPTER XVII

ARI-WA-KIS IN CHICAGO

“UNCLE DICK,” said Silvia, “I want to go to that big pony show, where there will be Indians and cow-boys and Western men.”

“And I stay at home,” said Aunt Louisa. “I’ve no pleasure in seeing men standing on their heads on the back of a pony, picking up handkerchiefs with their teeth.”

“They won’t go so far as that, Auntie,” said Silvia. “Will you go, Uncle Dick?”

“Have you a programme, then?” inquired Uncle Dick, looking at the paper the girl was unfolding.

Silvia Lake handed it to him, and after reading over the details, and noting a cross near the name of Din, the oil merchant declared it to be a capital bill.

Silvia told her friend Bertha Martin all about it, and then Bertha wanted to go more than anything else in life. Bertha's early life had been sadly overburdened by a heavy load of protection. She suffered from a father who meant her to know nothing, a mother who believed in ornamental daughters, and three big brothers who were always seeing to it that Bertha should never be played with by their fellow men. The result was fearfully hard on Bertha; and Silvia, whose compassion was awakened by her college chum's utter ignorance of the opposite sex, made herself into an enlightening companion. She would rather have taken her friend Rebecca Oyston to this particular show, but remembering that Rebecca's free, happy life had made her a happy world, these desires were given up at once, and it was decided that here was an opportunity to let Bertha Martin meet real men.

"I'll introduce her to Bill," thought Silvia, "and he'll do her real good, he's so manly. She'll get rid of that knight and forlorn maiden dream, which she carries about like a packet of candy."

Bill Din had written to Silvia and sent the notice of the show; and he had received a short note from her, telling him that he was to call at her uncle's house, when he chose, but that if he let her know the hour she would take care to be at home. Bill was so delighted that he went about the ranch like a madman. His partner, Toad Lorraine, startled him by saying on the evening before the event:

"I'm coming along too, I've entered in the show, and I mean to carry off a prize."

"You?" said Bill.

"Sure!" said Toad, rocking himself violently in a rocking-chair, to show he meant all his words.

"I counted on you for minding the ranch," said Bill.

"Some man can do it for us, 'long as we pay him good money," said Toad.

Bill stared at his partner.

Toad Lorraine was a freckled, red-haired, high-spirited youth of about twenty-three; the two men had been extremely happy in their business union;

but, while communicative enough in such affairs, they were shy of one another's personal life. Bill's love of Silvia, which was known high and low, had never yet been spoken of between the two friends—even the name of Silvia had never been mentioned by Toad Lorraine in the presence of Bill Din.

"A kinder pity you should just bud in when I've a special plan," said Bill. "Can't you go next show?"

"Next show in Kansas City? No, I want to go to Chicago."

"Spen's going along, too," said Bill. "Who'll mind the ranch?"

"That don't matter—he's no use at home," said Toad. "How about Buttress?"

"He'll never!" said Din.

"Thought you were friends," said Toad.

"Cut out!" said Bill.

"Spen ain't any use for a job of this sort," said Toad. "He'd just hold a high picnic every night, and forget the horses and they'd be hanging them-

selves in the stables—to git quit of the noise. Ask Gregson—Tom Gregson—there's two boys to the one farm—and Gregson likes horses. He'll do right enough, and then the three of us can go to Chicago."

Bill Din was silent, but not satisfied. He told Spen about it, and that man looked as wise as an owl, and for once he said nothing. The fact was, he could not make head nor tail of it.

The truth was simple, too simple for either Bill or Spen. Toad liked to do everything that Bill did, and had suddenly decided that if Bill were going to Chicago to show off before a girl, he would go and do the same thing.

"There'll sure be a friend of Miss Lake's, and the friend will do for me," said the high-spirited Toad. "Bill shall never be able to say that his red-haired partner lagged back."

So one bright spring day in the middle of March, three young men boarded a car, bound for Chicago. Bill Din was groomed to a high degree of perfection, and his stern gravity gave him the air of a man

worth knowing. Toad, who had bought a new suit for the occasion, wore a speckled green tie, to throw his auburn hair into relief, and he looked like one who was out for adventure. Spen, lanky and supple, with the expression of the owl redoubled, by the position he held as confidant in a great emprise, carried a pack of cards in his pocket, and a new suitcase in his hand.

"Beware of Chicago slugs!" said a man to the three travellers.

Spen raised his eyebrows in lofty scorn.

"They've got me!" he said.

"That's sure enough—what's the game?" inquired the man.

"A girl," said Spen, "and both for the same!"

"Gee, your hands are full!" said the man.

Spen nodded, and as the train rolled out of the depot, he felt as big as an Emperor.

He had never been so happy in all his life, for Power was the lover he wooed, and he was enjoying her presence.

CHAPTER XVIII

BILL RIDES IN CHICAGO

BILL did not sleep much the night before the pony running. The noise of the city dinned in his ears and the sound of his own heart roared in his brain. He repeated his thoughts again and again.

"I cannot fail because Silvia will be there. It is months since I have seen Silvia and she has asked me to call. And Buttress don't understand her, and she rented Ari-wa-kis to me, and I love her better than any one ever loved any one before, and I'll win her! She'll see me shining at my work, and she knows that I do it for her; and when it's over—when the running is over—she'll receive me—me! Bill Din! me—the winner!"

How could a man sleep when such thoughts were

racing through his brain; while a strange traffic reached his physical ears, like a grand accompaniment to his awakened heart? So Bill was up very early, and after breakfast made some excuse to disappear from Spen and Lorraine. He called at Beethoven House, where he met Uncle Dick coming down the marble steps of Silvia's new home.

Seeing a good-looking stranger, the oil merchant paused, and remarked:

"Can I be of any use to you, sir?"

And Din replied: "I am calling to see Miss Lake," and Uncle Dick went back to the house with him, took Bill into a large well-furnished room, and walked out to look for his niece.

"Silvia," he said, "he's come."

"Bill Din?"

"The wild Westerner from Ari-wa-kis, whom we are going to see at the horse show."

"Uncle!" said Silvia, "how you do use your imagination."

"You think I have none, Silvia, but it don't take any imagination to read a man's name on a

bill, and fit it to a figure like the one in the drawing-room."

So saying Uncle Dick went out to a committee meeting; and Silvia went to meet Bill, after six months' absence.

He was standing looking at a photo group, taken recently in Chicago; but when the door opened he was with Silvia in an instant.

He took both her hands and wrung them, and she winced with the pain, and then he begged a thousand pardons, and looked hard at her, and said:

"You're growing thin—it's ole Chicago, you want the fresh air of Ari-wa-kis."

"Oh, Bill, you do look like the good ole days," she cried. "I'm sure tired of this great Chicago."

"Say," said Bill, "do you miss them Ari-wa-kis days?"

She nodded.

"And how about—the people—miss us some?"

She nodded again, afraid to speak, for a wild

emotion disturbed her, and she did not wish Bill to guess it.

"I must quit talkin', got some work to do before this afternoon. Say, where'll you sit? I'll win if I can see you."

"Bill Din, you're as crazy as ever!"

"As much in love as ever, Silvia. Say, where'll you sit?"

Silvia ran out and came back with a plan of the stand, and showed him their places.

"What'll you wear?" said Bill. "I'd find you without knowing; but I want to be good and quick to spot you—'cos every minute counts."

"I'll have a green dress—like those leaves!" said Silvia, pointing to a plant at their feet. "And my friend Bertha Martin will be in claret red. And when the show's over we'll wait at the white entrance gate, and you'll be introduced to Bertha. I hope you'll like Bertha, Bill."

"Bertha," said Bill, rolling his eyes to the ceiling. "Wal', I've gotten a friend who'll like to see her, I'll bet my boots. I've brought Mr. Lorraine

with me, my partner. And say—Spen's here!"

"Oh—Spen! It's a wonder he ain't come along with you."

"Doesn't know I'm here. Good-bye Silvia. I can scarcely walk out o' the house to leave you in it. But there, I'll see you at the show. You're in green—like that plant."

"And Bertha's in claret red," said Silvia.

"Lorraine will be certainly delighted," said Bill, as he went down the marble steps into the broad paved street.

"They're sure high-tones in this quarter," said Bill to himself. "Wish she was located in a log cabin."

Bill had lunch with two other men but scarcely remembered it—except that he was careful what he ate, on account of the coming sport.

He managed to see Lorraine alone, for a few minutes, when Spen was looking in a depot for leather goods.

"Toad," said Bill, "Miss Lake brings a friend

to the show called Miss Bertha Martin. She'll be in claret red cloth."

"Sounds interestin'," said Toad, turning a warmer tint.

"I'll be preoccupied with Miss Lake, owing to the fact that I'm renting land from her; so if you'll give Miss Martin your care, I'll sure appreciate it."

"Certainly, certainly," said Toad, with enthusiasm. "Leave Miss Martin to my charge, and I'll see she has a good time all right. Say, what'll she wear?"

"Claret red cloth," said Bill.

"Claret red cloth," repeated Toad. "That's a real fine colour, and no mistake. Ain't it good that I came along now?"

"It's certainly just right," said Bill.

And both men became silent, as Spen rejoined them.

The afternoon was fine, and the last few days had been free from rain, so the ground was in good order. Everything that happened to Bill became like the parts in a grand dream. The great mo-

ment had come at last. He found himself astride his pony, cantering out before a sea of faces; and immediately he allowed all Chicago to see him search for the lady of his choice. He did it slowly and deliberately. Everybody could tell that Bill Din was looking for a lady, and that he cared for nobody else in all the world. He found her soon, the slender green speck, with opera-glasses in her hand; and into his ardent nature there came an extension of strength, will, and tact. It seemed to Bill that anything could be done, so long as the owner of the green dress remained watching his movements.

Silvia was sitting next to Bertha and the conversation between them was curious and broken.

"Who is he?" cried Bertha, gazing at Bill.

"My friend," said Silvia.

"He's the handsomest man I ever saw!" said Bertha.

"You've seen so few," said Silvia.

"Surely no," said Bertha. "Poppa's having company ever so often."

"But then you don't get acquainted, and that makes the difference," said Silvia. "Don't talk; you'll miss the fun."

When Bill Din won a race and Lorraine came in second, Uncle Dick cheered loudly for Ari-wa-kis.

"Who is the Red-head?" he inquired of Silvia.

"Din's partner, Lorraine," said Silvia.

"Both champions, sure," said Uncle Dick.
"They must both come back with us."

The clapping was tremendous when Bill took a first for pony leaping, and another for pony tricks. He was certainly the champion of the field, and not another boy had a look in where Bill was concerned. But not another boy there had Silvia to think of, and the future of Silvia to dream of, and Silvia's rich uncle to appease; and not another boy had gathered so much hope from the face of Silvia in the morning. The men were spent with their exertions when they met the party at the white gate, but Bill's grey eyes did all and more than duty for his tongue. Uncle Dick and Silvia told him he was the first pony rider in U. S. A.—bar

none, and all he did was to gaze steadily at Silvia, and rub the perspiration from his forehead with a large green handkerchief.

"And don't forget Lorraine," he said at last. "Lorraine took a first at quick harnessing—sure—that was another good hit from Ari-wa-kis."

"Champion!" said Uncle Dick. "Mr. Lorraine, you're slick with your fingers, and I'll bet a fiver you save time in the stables."

Lorraine bowed low and he was introduced to Bertha Martin, when he bowed lower still. Uncle Dick, who was effervescent with delight, said to Silvia that the "Ari-wa-kis boys were as pliable as india-rubber," and then, somehow Uncle Dick disappeared, and there was only Silvia and Bill and Bertha and Toad.

The sky, which had appeared a dull uniform grey, immediately turned bright blue; and without the least trouble in the world, the two couples lost themselves. They lost themselves in twos and twos and Bill said to Silvia:

"That uncle of yours is a man in a million and

I just hope that he has a woman of gold for a partner. He deserves the best."

But one man had been neglected and that was Spen. He had been kept back with the ponies, the two young riders begging him to see to some business for them, and promising faithfully to await him at the white gate.

Traitors to their henchman, they had both forgotten him, and he arrived there to find them walking away in twos and twos.

It was Silvia who noticed his absence, and asked Bill why Spen had not joined them.

"For pity's sake," said Bill. "He was to have met us here. It's no use going back. He could have joined your uncle. For pity's sake!"

"Let's wire him to take dinner at Beethoven House," said Silvia. "Spen likes big ways of doing things—that'll take the sting out of it all. I'll wire him."

So they went into a telegraph office and wired to the hotel; and then the two young people took a walk into one of the parks.

It was a wonderful afternoon, and considering the early spring, lasted well. Silvia asked question after question about the land, and the horses, and the dog, and the lake.

"And Mr. Buttress?" she asked.

It was nearly dusk, and Bill's fierce heart got working hard at this moment.

"Buttress—I think he's changed—some, Silvia."

"And Mr. Buttress is very well?" inquired Silvia.

"Is there anything more about other men that is real interestin' to you?" inquired Bill, gloomily.

"There, Bill—there—you're mad! You sure make me crazy."

"Me too!" said Bill. "Silvia, you don't know more than a—baby—how I feel when you go asking after everybody but me."

"I think I do, Bill. I think I know too well. You always want me to forget everybody but you."

They were coming out of the park, and Bill begged her to forgive him; for the sake of the feeling that lay behind it. And so they got on a

car, to ride to the quarter where homes were ornamental.

The dinner party was an event to Spen and Lorraine; and to Bill it was merely part of the big dream in which Silvia was enshrined. He vowed to himself, as he pretended to take soup, fowl, and entrée, that before the night was over Silvia should be his girl.

Aunt Louisa, cool as starch can make white calico, was greatly amused with the Ari-wa-kis trio, but Bill pleased her. Bill's pride, his dignity, the tremendous importance of his one idea, cut him off from the common-place.

Uncle Dick saw as plainly as possible that the young man was in the fiercest stages of love's fires, and as soon as dinner was over, he gave the young people every chance to see more of one another. He kept Spen and Aunt Louisa, and Lorraine and Bertha busy with albums and music and curiosities. And so, quite easily, Bill got Silvia to himself.

They were on the south porch where Aunt Louisa kept her best ferns. It was a dark night,

no moon, no stars. Clouds everywhere, except in Bill's heart, which was aflame like the morning sun. And Silvia was quiet and nervous and not mistress of herself. Ari-wa-kis troubled her. She was tired of Chicago. And Bill was like a breath of Ari-wa-kis, and he was as true as steel.

"Silvia, you love liberty, I know," he said. "Don't I love liberty too? We're both Americans, we're under the Stars and Stripes, and we can't think outside it. Sure, Silvia, I've waited long for this. I've loved you years and years! I am, God knows, a desperately lonely fellow, ranching away with Lorraine, amongst bunches of wild horses and miles o' prairie—I'm first man anywhere with a horse; but I'm the loneliest in U. S. A. I'd go down on the sod to my death for you, and never feel it dying—true, as God's word, I wouldn't—I love you so true and tender—you so—why Silvia, if you ain't meant for me, I should never have been born."

"Bill," said Silvia in a whisper, "it ain't right. You think too much of me."

"That won't hurt, darling—lovin' you too much is a good fault in a man!"

"But it hurts, Bill, it hurts liberty. I can't be bound, Bill! I'm liberty lovin'—I'm terrible liberty lovin'—I like trust."

"Sure, didn't I trust you! Always, always!"

"But you're often unhappy, Bill, just because you love me."

"That's 'cos you ain't given me the promise. Give me the promise! Give me the promise, Silvia. Here, on this blessed porch, say Bill Din's the man!"

Aunt Louisa came out with a watering can to look after her ferns.

Bill thought that there must be an explosion, the charge to his feelings was so violent. Silvia leapt to her feet and began chattering with her aunt, and Bill thought how clever she was—a most wonderful girl to throw dust in the eyes of the lady; and certainly Silvia did it with ease and spirit. But afterwards, when Bill was whispering to her on the south porch, and when he had pressed her to

speak the one word, he felt that her cheek was burning with fire, as though she had suffered through the interruption.

And the intuition gave Bill some vision—the aunt was the cause of Silvia's sufferings, and the cause of Silvia's thinness, and the cause of Silvia's wistful eyes.

"She don't understand you," said Bill, "that aunt of yours."

Silvia was quiet, very quiet.

"I'm sure sorry," he said.

"Uncle Dick's good," she whispered.

"Sure, he's a jewel! Silvia, let me take you from her? I'm more'n she is."

"You," whispered Silvia. "Heaps more!"

And Bill kissed her, and the fearful loneliness of the six months melted the girl's doubts. She leaned her head against his shoulder and felt a few moments' sense of rest as she gave the faltering word; but, following it, there came a fierce overwhelming surprise.

"I'll never, never forget Louis Buttress," she

found herself repeating, and the voice came from some far away, deep, distant place. After that she went very cold, and told Bill that she never wanted to marry any one.

But Bill laughed her fears away, and said she was always a doubter, but the rest of the evening was strange and wan to Silvia Lake. It stretched out lengthily in ashen colours. Far away in the depths of her being, she had found herself a prisoner.

She accepted Bill's joyous whispers in dead silence.

"She's afraid of her liberty goin'," said Bill to himself. "In all my experience of life I never did meet any one that so hung on liberty, but sure I'll see she has all she wants of a free life—none more so than me! But she's frightened of havin' her wings clipped, and it gives her the blues."

When they said good-bye, Silvia was quieter still:

"I'll write," she said, looking sadly at him.

"Sure!" said Bill.

His grey eyes gazed triumphantly at the girl, as though he added: "My Silvia!"

But caution kept the word unexpressed. Nevertheless she shuddered, for she felt its force.

CHAPTER XIX

SHERIDAN FORESTALLS SPEN'S NEWS

SHERIDAN, going into Henrikson's hardware store in Alamanca Creek, met Spen in the doorway.

"Hello!" said Spen. "Never seen you since Gregson beat you in that darned silly argument 'bout acting. Where's Buttress? What, ain't you still with him? Tell him I've been in Chicago, with Bill Din and Lorraine, and we've carried off the hul' show, and come back first rate. We seen Miss Lake, too—seen her home and how she lives, and Din's a welcome guest. 'Taint my business to let out the truth, but Bill's wedding day's in sight!"

Sheridan went back to his room at a run. The afternoon was warm, but he knew that Buttress, who had been in town over some work, had in-

tended changing some books, before going back to Ari-wa-kis.

"I must see him," muttered the Englishman.

Buttress had not gone. He had the books in his hand, and was locking the door.

"Come back a minute," said Sheridan. He undid the door.

Buttress returned into the room.

"I have heard news," said Sheridan. "Miss Lake is engaged to Bill Din."

Buttress put down the books and took them up, and laid them back again and walked away to the door before he spoke.

"Thank you," he said with an effort. "Thank you for all you've done—'bout me!"

"I'd have done something serviceable if I could, instead of telling you this, and I beg you to forgive me for speaking of it. I'd go and see her, Buttress. It was only Spen who told me!"

"Thank you," said Buttress, again. "You see it ain't a bit o' use."

And he opened the door, and went out into Main Street.

Sheridan looked angrily at the books. He pushed them away, so that they fell on the floor.

He went to the cupboard and got out a bottle of brandy. He prepared a drink for himself and took it off at a draught.

Putting everything away again, he came out into the street.

CHAPTER XX

“WHY WAS I BORN?”

BUTTRESS was thankful to get into the air. It was a clear and bright evening, and the sun was setting. A sigh of relief escaped him.

He walked away towards Ari-wa-kis. It was a slow descent for a mile and a half; and then a slight rise, as the wooded slopes of the lake came in view. Louis never looked at the water. He was humming an air. It was Fielding's famous hunting song: and an hour had passed sounded by Alamanca Church clock, before he reached his cabin. The dogs soon discovered him and came out to meet him. Their greeting thawed his feelings, and he spoke to them in a different voice. Presently they failed to elicit a sound from their master. He entered the unlocked cabin and went for matches.

Having got them, he threw them away again.

He sat down on a bench.

Thoughts came tumultuously — then, they stopped altogether, and he sat in a stupor. He sat for many hours.

Morning broke gently over Ari-wa-kis slopes.

He went out with his gun and took to the woods, followed by both dogs.

So, for three days, Buttress did nothing but rove, hunt, and meditate. The cabin was deserted by day, and was a sorry place at night. He was there at night sometimes to add to its melancholy; but not always, for often he tramped the woods. He did some curious things in those few days. He took to writing in pencil on the walls of the cabin.

Simon watched him, and would lick Louis's hands after it was done. He wrote: "Where is God?" "Why am I here?" "Who made me go through these days?"

He would sit and stare at his own handwriting, as if someone else had done it.

Once he wrote: "What is death?" and began

the answer—"The dividing place between the body and the——"

He heard someone coming and threw the pencil away.

"If it is Bill Din, he will know it," he said.

The steps died away. It had been Spen; but the absence of smoke from the hunter's chimney had sent the man off without further searching. Louis meant the man to think he was away.

"Now I am tired of the best—I will enjoy the worst—yes, I think I could enjoy the worst," he said.

And he smiled to himself.

"Bill Din won her. Yes. But he must take care. No one knows the real Silvia but me!"

"Life is full of mistakes," he said. "She'll find it out too late."

Here Buttress rubbed his unshaven chin, and grew ominous looking, so that the dogs cocked their ears and stood at attention. All he said was: "To prevent mistakes, I ought to act." Then he

laughed scornfully:—“I have no power over any mortal creature, barring dogs and beasts.”

“And the man has good reason to be chosen. Looks are something. Physical being is a reason. Character—good! I venture to say, Simon, that she chooses right, without knowing why!”

There came one morning, when the day was hot. Louis, going out with his gun, caught sight of a “Bob White” perched on the topmost branch of a tree. The bird, uttering its syllabic notes, flew ahead into the blue ether, only to repeat the sounds again and again whenever he found an inviting branch. Wandering into the brush, the man saw a bluebird dart out of the willows, and the gleam of the soft-blue wings gave the hunter a momentary joy. Then, realizing what his life had come to, he stared at it, in angry wonder.

“There was I—a happy man—huntin’—doin’ nobody any harm. Then I tried to ‘better myself,’ as Mother called it, and I got this for my pains. All is spoiled. What does it mean? What does it mean, but that Father was right, and it

is best to stay down in peace, even if it ain't movin'!"

"Father was good to me—" he muttered—"Father was best I have ever had. I can see him, a droppin' his work like a shot if I looked at him for somethin'—Father answered all my questions —some of 'em was queer questions, and queer answers, but Father done his best. Father was A. I. And poor Mother died before I could recall her features! Many's the picnic we've had in the woods together. That was *my* life—that was! That was a bit of living. Then, came hunting—Well—it was fine sport—and now—it's lost in this bad fog—this wicked fog of trying to be more than I am!"

Louis was diving into the woods now, and with practised feet finding the way to his best places.

"Let Bill marry her," he said. "I say let him do it. And there's an end to it. Oh, Silvia, Silvia! You've done me. You've sure done for the hunter! Men like me ain't bits of pawns

and nine-pins to be knocked down, to be picked up. I'm sure done with rising—I'm for the down-road now, and put there by——"

Louis stopped because he had seen a coon. The little animal, high in the branches of an oak tree, was grinning madly at him, with soft shining eyes. The two dogs began barking furiously.

"Come off!" said Louis. "Let her alone—ger' off! Up a tree like me—leave her, you two cruel hounds!"

And he kicked Simon, who whined in expostulation; and maddened with a blow, where he expected love, crept away with pitiful moaning.

"The beast feels like me," said Louis, watching him. "There he goes, wounded to the heart. Wal, he's one in a majority. Guess it is life. Sheridan was hit hard. And Bill will be—yes, Bill will be! I could hit Bill hard. I bet the blow I could give Bill would sure finish him."

Louis Buttress paused to consider how, and cried:—"It ain't Bill that knows her, it is Buttress, the ole hunter. He knows her. He can make her

forget Bill. I'll not be dull any more. I'll have plenty to do. There's great work besides the huntin' for me! I'm down—I never was nothin'—and so—there—now I'll enjoy—the game—you've lcft me, Silvia! I'll——”

And then he got a sudden shock for he saw that he had nearly penetrated to the edge of the lake; and would in another minute see the south bank of Ari-wa-kis.

It was months since he had been here, not since the time immediately before Sylvester Lake's death. He drew carefully out of the brush, noting the ground, for fear of morass; and presently the trees fell backwards, leaving only the mass of brush that ran down to the water. There was a welter of spring greens shaking in the morning breeze, from the yellow red of budding oaks, to the pale green of wild-cherry blossom wands, waving delicately like moving spirits.

With his weary eyes Louis sought to scan the water, searching as by instinct for game of some sort; and suddenly, he could not tell how it came,

but the sweat broke out on his forehead, and a sharp cool agony enveloped him.

"Why was I born?" he muttered.

The silence was in the heat of midday, and yet Louis was shivering with cold; and Simon, awed by the same feeling, stood close by, mute and still.

"I know," said Louis, "why I came here. I came here for the truth. I wronged her. I wronged Silvia. I wronged Bill Din with hard thoughts. I laughed at them all in my ignorance. And then I was worse than all of them put together, I wanted the woman. There I was, same as another, caught on the wheel I'd sure scorned, and ready for anythin' to get my way. Readier than another to stoop to it! Justice! There ain't none from man to man—'cept by accident—God Almighty knows when we get it and when we don't! We deal it out crooked as our thoughts."

He stumbled along, a little nearer the water; until its coolness touched him, with a wave of damper air coming from its surface. "There I

seen her first," he said. "It was sure trust: I carry it to my grave."

"Ah, Simon," he cried, "you may lick me though I don't deserve it. I think I've gone mad."

Buttress turned away from the water; and scrambling through the brush, with Simon and Testy almost on him, he slowly returned to the log-cabin.

The cabin door was wide open.

The hunter went into the hut, and shut the door.

CHAPTER XXI

“I'M LIKE THE FOXES”

A YOUNG moon came up over the prairie, so clear and lambent that the wave in the grass could be seen. Bill Din sat on the wooden steps outside the kitchen door.

Toad had been to the mail-box, and he threw a letter at Bill and went into the house.

It was an unstamped letter and bore a laboured handwriting, which was unknown to the pony boy. He got up from his seat at the door and followed Lorraine into the living-room.

The lamp was lit and Toad was reading a stock-paper, standing close to the table. Bill followed his example and undid the letter. Its contents surprised him very much.

DEAR BILL DIN:—The dogs are yours, that's all I care to leave. I've done with Ari-wa-kis for this life.

Never hunt me out. I'm like the foxes, I'm going where none can get me.

Yours respectfully,

LOUIS BUTTRESS.

Bill read the letter again, and turned it carefully over, but there was no more information to be gained from the paper.

"Funny of Buttress," he said to himself. "What's gone wrong?"

He came out into the yard, and looked across the prairie.

"No, I can't make it out. S'pose he'll leave his bit of land to go to pieces. That's like Buttress—no commerce in him. What's gotten hold of him?"

Speculating, Bill went to the stables and saddled Gin-fly. He decided to ride over to the log-hut, and have a look at things.

It was a lovely spring night, and Bill's thoughts roved to Silvia and the plans they would have together, and while doing this, time sped on wings, and he found himself nearing Buttress's place,

without much more thought about the hunter. Dismounting and tying up the horse, he went up to the door of the cabin, only to find it locked, but the window gave under his vigorous pushes, and the pony boy, holding it up, clambered into the room.

CHAPTER XXII

“A HUNTER’S MOTTO”

HE made such an effort getting into the room, that he upset some papers. He took them up and placed them back on the bracket, putting a brush and comb on top of them.

Doing this he saw the pencil marks on the wall, and read: “Where is God?”

“Poor ole Buttress!” said Din, tenderly. “He’s worried more’n any of us would have thought. And what’s this?” he cried, marking out more words written in lead pencil; and there he saw: “O, Silvia, Silvia!”

Din gazed at the writing in blank amazement, and went round the room, investigating. He saw the words: “What is death?” and he read the answer where it broke off, and then he came to

one line, which he could not leave. It was "She makes me live."

"That's true," said Bill, biting his lip. "Who would have thought he knew so much?"

And then he read: "He that has the deer, never hunted him."

"That's good," said Bill, "but it ain't a hunter's motto. It's a queer thing to write out a heart on the walls of a hut, for it might any minute be made public. I'd sure leave it in my soul."

And he went forward with his work. So roaming about the room, in a peculiar mood of sympathy and some similar pain, Bill chanced on an open letter, left on the hunter's table. It had evidently been intended for the fire and rescued; and Bill seeing the familiar writing, felt a tingling like the fire go through his frame. He must see that one letter, which poor Buttress had refused him.

It was altogether a scorching affair, whether read or left, but Bill read it. And he got his reward. He put it back on the table, with stiff fingers, saying in a troubled voice: "That's

strange—she never, no never, wrote so kind to me!"

"No, never!" repeated Bill, looking wildly round the room.

And he crept out of the window, and stuffed it with rags, and made it tight as a vice.

None must learn the poor hunter's secret.

And then Bill went galloping home to the prairie land.

CHAPTER XXIII

“WHY BELIEVE SPEN?”

BUTTRESS got off the train at Chicago, on his way to Canada, and found he had two hours to wait before he went North; so he walked out of the depot, and came into Michigan Avenue.

“ ’Twas Spen told the news to Sheridan,” he said, “and when did Spen ever tell a tale like reality?”

And as he said these words Buttress gazed across the lake.

He stood on the pavement considering everything.

“Two hours. I could see her. Why believe Spen?”

He looked about him.

“Suppose it was true? Where’s the harm in

sayin' Good-bye? Why ain't I to have the words from Silvia? It's come to this with me, I'm bound to see her."

Buttress went back to the depot and got directions. He took a car for some distance and then his way was along streets shaded with trees now shaking out their spring dresses, and the sky above him was blue. It was one of the first hot days of spring, and in its warmth the grass of the prairie would be leaping into colour and life; but it was like a sudden summer in the confines of the city, and a languor was over everything. Louis asked his way many times and was always directed with care and interest. The house that surprised the pony boys produced no feeling in the hunter beyond the knowledge that Silvia was now within reach of his voice.

Buttress saw her writing in the window at a small table, and the maid who had admitted him, took him into this room and shut the door.

Silvia looked up and started to her feet.

Buttress came forward.

“I hear you are to marry Bill Din, but still, somethin’ made me come this morning to ask you if it is true?”

“Somethin’ made you come—what was it done it, Louis?” she cried.

“Silvester Lake’s daughter can know the story of the old hunter. He loved the hunt and he loved the wilds and he loved the world of dumb creatures to a far degree, and carried out his pleasure to the top of his bent. And he lived full and beautiful, he did, and there ain’t nothin’ shifted him from his deepest desires, till, at last, one day, in God’s good will, he seen a woman whom he naturally loved above all, and she was Silvester’s daughter. And he loved her at a distance for many a day—’twas a thought on a hill top—but in God’s will she came nearer and nearer to his thoughts, and then he loved her, nearer too—he did—kinder close—nearer too—and it come to be *her* life, more’n all else, that held *him* to life.”

Silvia had been listening with her face turned

away from Louis, but when he stopped speaking she walked up to him and stood beside him.

"You don't say nothin'," he said. "You're amazed at my thinkin' things out, but I'm bound to tell you that you've ordered my life out of its course. Still, I wouldn't undo it, I wouldn't go back on the ole rut for nothin'—not whatever comes of it. You've made me human, Silvia Lake; I'm related to common humanity by the bonds of natural feelin' and, strange to tell, you done it, without meanin' it.—All the things that's done natural tells a livin' tale. You don't speak. Can't you say a word to your ole neighbour?"

"Why did you wait until now?" cried Silvia.

"You plead with me! You cry out! But what have I done?"

"Louis! Louis!" said Silvia, "why didn't you say it long ago?"

"What have I done, Silvia Lake?"

"I wish you'd told me long ago."

"What should I have tolle you, my dear girl?"

"All about what you felt, Louis. You shouldn't

have stood back, only to tell me now. I told you in the desert how I'd found my life empty. I told you I knew more'n you did! So I did! You don't know the life I've led, nor what you've meant to me! If you did know you'd have come long ago. I've lived up there at Ari-wa-kis, actin' like I didn't care or think; but all the time I was thinking and living and seeing what things meant. And many a time I've been pretty sick of everything I seen and heard—it was so mean and poor and bad. And you were neighbour to us, but you never looked in to see Dad and me—you never looked in once in your life.”

“It was presumption, Silvia. It was beyond me to think of it.”

“You think of it now. And you come and tell me. You might have come sooner if you hadn't loved the woods better'n me! But you've come, and you've told me, and I've heard you, and I tell you that I love you. And I'll have you now, Louis, though you might have come long since—still, I'll have you now—and I'll keep you to it.”

"Silvia, this is a maddening, joyous surprise."

"It'll last till Doomsday then, for it's come out of everything good. Oh, Louis, little did I think this morning that you'd be here! Little, little did I think! I wish I'd known it!"

"Silvia, what about Bill Din?"

"What—about Bill—nothin'! Oh, Louis, let's forget! There's nothin' about Bill, from my soul I'll say it!"

"We can't forget Bill, and that the poor fellow loves you real well, same as me, and we can't forget that he's been here for the races, and that I come here thinkin' he was first with you—you've been friends, Silvia, and you've made him your companion——"

"So I did—Louis. But I never promised Bill Din—I never promised!"

"I'm a blamed happy fellow, then! And now I'm going North to see what I can make of myself, and when I've made good, I'll come back for you."

"You're good enough for me, Louis. Don't leave me."

"But I've got to be a somebody now, for your sake!"

"I tell you, Louis, that from my experience of life, I'd rather have you now, than wait for you to be made good."

"Maybe you're right, Silvia. I don't know but what you ain't jist right."

"You should trust, Louis. I'll trust."

Buttress considered for several moments, and then said: "We'll trust. We'll go North together; that'll be fine! I'll see your uncle. What age are you, Silvia?"

"Nineteen, and far more than nineteen in experiencing life. I can see good and bad, as clear as night and day. And I'm pretty nearly dead with the life in Chicago. There's no meaning in the city life for me, and there ain't a breath of the woods in Chicago, unless I dream of them at night. And I like you as you are, Louis, just as you are!"

"Then now for your uncle," said Buttress.

"The trouble will be with Aunt Louisa," said

Silvia, as she led the way to the dining-room, "but the thing must be done, whatever the trouble, because we've both got to make good—me as well as you, and we're best fighting our battles together."

CHAPTER XXIV

UNCLE DICK IS SURPRISED

TO this Louis Buttress made no reply, but he followed Silvia to the dining-room, where Uncle Dick was studying *Forest Lore*. The last two or three pages had not served to hold Richard Sugden's attention. Bill Din had been in his mind. He had been wondering if it were wise to separate Silvia Lake from her companion by this new life in Chicago. He had been wondering if it would not have been better if she had remained at Ari-wa-kis. He had been wondering if two temperaments that have nothing in common, as this aunt and niece, could ever benefit by living under the same roof; and right into the midst of all this conjecturing came Silvia Lake with Louis Buttress.

Uncle Dick saw a tall, broad-set man, whose eyes held him in an instant.

"Mr. Buttress wants to speak to you, Uncle Dick," said Silvia. "He's my neighbour at Ari-wa-kis."

She went out shutting the door, and the two men stood looking at one another.

"My niece's property is not to be sold," said Sugden, beginning where he thought there was a subject.

"I ain't got any interest in her property," said Buttress drily.

Sugden looked at the man. "Then what do you want?" he said.

"Silvia Lake."

"My niece! What on earth have you to do with my niece?"

"She has promised to marry me, and as I am going into Canada I want to take her with me."

"This is amazing!" cried Uncle Dick. "What about Din?" he continued. "What about the man who has the pony ranch?"

Buttress's eyes flickered, but he said nothing.

He continued to gaze at Sugden, waiting for the answer.

"I had always understood, that Din was the man who would talk to me like this. My niece has accepted you? Is this done in some mood or whim? My niece is not grown up, and I should advise you to take little heed of what she says to you. You wait, Mr. Buttress, wait, and don't build on this."

Louis Buttress drew a step nearer, and said firmly: "Her mind and my mind is made up. We'll marry. You may think it all a 'flash in the pan' and nothin' to last, but there you're right out of it. She and I understand one another. She's young, I know, and all before her, but I'm older—and I'll sure take care of her."

"You're a mad-man," said Uncle Dick. "Your pluck is—visionary! Din's been the man up till now, I'm sorry for you. You are most praiseworthy, but you're putting all your venture——"

Uncle Dick paused, and added in a lower voice: "In caprice, youth's caprice."

"Caprice!" said Buttress. "This ain't a matter

of doubt. This comes from the heart. God fashioned hearts before men fashioned words. There's some things known before words. Silvia Lake is the woman for me."

Richard Sugden drew back several steps from the hunter and looked at him out of his far-away, pale eyes, with their wistful eyebrows. All at once, it seemed to Silvia's uncle as if he were a boy again and the spring had come and the maple trees—the sap—the melting snows. He immediately stopped the picture that was rising, and looking sharply at the hunter, said, briskly: "I must see my niece, of course. Your purpose is so well pursued that I feel like seeing you again. Come again. But once more let me remind you of the fearful shipwreck there is when men venture solid goods on airy skiffs—fancy rules youth."

"Oh, I'll come again," said Buttress.

And with these words, he went out into the street.

Uncle Dick stood alone in the quiet dining-room, with his thumb and finger on *Forest Lore*,

saying to himself in a pensive voice: "How he takes me back to the days when I could run and leap and believe and live! How slowly time imprisons us, until—dear, dear me, what course shall I pursue?"

CHAPTER XXV

“ AND UNCLE DICK WORRIES”

SILVIA found her uncle thinking hard and began at once: “Uncle Dick, it ain’t a bit of use. You must just say ‘Yes’ and let me go. You see you ain’t brought me up. Dad did it. And he did it his own way. I’m Dad’s child, and that’s all there is to it. When I think a thing’s right, it’s got to be done, or there’ll be some running away to git liberty. You’ll save yourself a lot of trouble, and me a lot of scheming, and Aunt Louisa will be real glad—once she knows!”

“That’s not my thought, Silvia. I’m thinking of the young man who won the races.”

“Why? That’s nothin’ to do with what I’m telling you now. I’m telling you that Louis and I mean to get married next week. Don’t you think

he's good and solid enough to mind two people's affairs? Louis understands me. He don't boss. If I'm bossed I ain't a bit o' use to anybody in this world—I git so mad, I could spoil the whole house. I'm real sorry about Aunt Louisa, Uncle Dick, but we'll never be friends. Best way out is this way. Ain't you pleased with Louis Buttress? Ain't he great?"

"But you're young. Here's a chance at college, you'll never get it again, and you're shutting up the book of knowledge, all because you're a bit tired of Chicago and life here, and you want a romp in the woods. That's the truth in a nut-shell."

"There you don't know me, Uncle Dick! Talkin' more as if I were fifteen than nearly nineteen and more as if I was one of these kids that never managed their own affairs than a girl that's kept house for her father ever since she could run about. And I've managed everything and everybody, and I don't believe very good in these late marriages—the sooner you git settled down to work, the better for the world. Once I'm Mrs. Louis Buttress I'll

git real serious, and be useful to my country. If you don't let me, I'll do it!"

Uncle Dick hesitated. He was beginning a speech about Aunt Louisa when he suddenly remembered that Louis Buttress would return. So he left the problem to be solved when the hunter called again.

"The man's the right man!" Uncle Dick kept saying to himself. "I feel it's a problem altogether. And the man's the right man."

Buttress called again in the evening, and found Uncle Dick sitting on the porch, reading the newspaper.

This time there was very little said by either of the men.

"Her mind isn't full grown," said Richard Sugden. "You see what it means, Mr. Buttress?"

"I'm best one to be with her while it grows," said Louis. "I'm good at tending growth."

"You're confident—she's got the week—seven days in which to change her mind. Perhaps it will be Din to-morrow."

"There ain't any one in U. S. A. better able to know her own mind, and keep to it, than Silvia Lake," said Louis Buttress.

Sugden folded up the newspaper, laid it on an empty chair beside him, and held out his hand to the hunter.

"You shall have your chance," he said, "you and Silvia. We'll see how it can be done."

And the two men walked away together.

And that evening Silvia Lake sat down to write to Bill Din, but she never got farther than the date.

Tearing up the paper, she said to herself, "I'll write on the wedding-day—that'll be best."

So she put it off once again.

CHAPTER XXVI

SILVIA ADVENTURES

CHICAGO was rioting in her spring dress, the parks were showing every hue of green, and the sun was bringing the blossoms out in the suburbs.

Mam' Dulcie called out in glee: "Sure thing, honey, there ain't been a sweeter day than this one in all the year!"

And then, putting her head into the room again, she smiled with delight.

Silvia Lake was packing a suitcase and it was ten o'clock on a Thursday morning in April. Uncle Dick was pacing to and fro downstairs. Aunt Louisa was shopping. Mam' Dulcie, whose whole life had been spent in the Sugden household, was in possession of a secret, which enchanted her and it compelled her to talk all the time.

"Sure thing, Missy, I dunno how 'twill be when it all comes out, but you done all right to take along and marry the best. There's some folk know one thing, and some another, but there's only two folk know when to marry—honey—dat is the two consarned—youself and him. My ole man dun run after me, sure as fate, and he made me go to the church, and to the church I went, and married him. Sure as I live, honey, I never had a grain of trouble with him, since—'ceptin' for a way he has of shuttin' all the windows. We all have our ways, Missy, and honest to goodness, you have a bit more of a way than many that come along, but he looks a wise man, wise as Solomon, sure as I live I believe it. Dat's whar Providence minds you!"

Silvia, having packed the suitcase, proceeded to put on a navy blue coat and hat. She had never spoken a word while she got ready, but had continued to work while Mam' Dulcie chattered.

Now she came to the negro woman and took her hands and held them.

"Give Aunt Louisa the letter when I've been gone an hour——"

"Sure, Missy—'twill be done! I'll throw it in her way."

"Give it her at one o'clock."

"Not before, Missy—in case of him not bein' thar, or somethin' happenin'. At one o'clock, honey, your auntie shall know it!"

"Dulcie! O—I feel—I want somethin'——"

"Sure, honey, 'tis natural. God bless you, honey. I ain't fine white folk to kiss you and bless you, but you ain't got a mammy and ole Dulcie sees how you've raised yourself. Sure like a lil' turkey in an orchard, comin' and goin' as it pleased you, the consarn of no one! And 'tis best to finish like lil' turkey, makin' a dash for the place you want. Honey, I'll kiss you for dat mammy you never remember. You've sure raised yourself real well."

Silvia Lake's head rested on Mam' Dulcie's shoulder for a minute, and then, having kissed the negro-woman, she said: "Dulcie, I ain't never

had a mother that loved to dress me up, and see me real smart. I want her somethin' fierce! But I'm the proudest woman in Chicago. In an hour I'll be Mrs. Louis Buttress! Say, you must come and stay with me, when we're home again, and got the house straight. Now I must be off, and there's Uncle Dick."

Silvia ran downstairs into the hall, where Uncle Dick was waiting for her.

"Good-bye, Mammy!" cried Silvia, for the last time.

"Good-bye, honey!" cried the old negro, leaning over the banister. "You'll be back to lunch, I reckon, so I'll 'spect you!"

"Uncle Dick," said Silvia, when they got into the street. "As long as I live I'll think of you as a Champion Man. You're the best uncle that ever lived and you'll never regret trustin' me. I'm not a kid. I'm a real grown woman, and I know what's best for me, and no one else in this world knows anythin' about it, as far as I can see. Whatever is the use of college for me? Louis and me can

study together on the long winter nights—and Aunt Louisa—she don't know what to do with me—it's makin' her sick—I'm sure a desperate woman when I'm left in the city!"

To all this Uncle Dick made no reply. There was no more thoughtful man in all Chicago, than the man who was trusted with Silvia's plans.

CHAPTER XXVII

AUNT LOUISA AROUSED

AUNT LOUISA was in the dining-room, taking off her hat. Uncle Dick was standing by the window, with a book in his hands. He was apparently reading it, but the book was upside down.

Aunt Louisa did not see this, but she was cheerfully folding her veil, and considering the question of a new coat for Silvia. Yet she noticed Uncle Dick's manner, and she said suddenly: "You have a headache, Dick?"

"No—yes! Perhaps I have," said Sugden.

"You think too much!" said Aunt Louisa.

Uncle Dick looked at his wife but said nothing.

"Oh, there's a note for me!" said Mrs. Sugden quickly. "Silvia—has she gone out?"

"Dulcie will know," said Uncle Dick. "Dulcie was with her this morning."

As Mrs. Sugden had unfastened the envelope and was preparing to read the letter, Uncle Dick turned over five pages of the book he was not reading, and kept saying to himself: "Now for it—now for it—now for it."

"Dick!" exclaimed Mrs. Sugden. "Silvia's run away—run away—to be married. We must stop it—we must stop them."

Uncle Dick gazed at Aunt Louisa, but neither moved nor spoke a word.

"Dick! Are you mad? Do you hear me? Read that note! No, ring for Dulcie!"

And without waiting for him to do it, Mrs. Sugden went out of the dining-room. Uncle Dick took up the letter and read the following lines:—

DEAR AUNT LOUISA,—This is sure a glad day for all of us. I'm by this time Mrs. Louis Buttress to whom you must refer if you want to know anything about Silvia Lake. We are going to Canada. We are taking the Millionaire's express to New York.

Your affectionate niece,

SILVIA BUTTRESS.

Uncle Dick bit his lips, but there was almost a gleam in his eye. It went away swiftly, as he heard the approach of Aunt Louisa.

"Dick, what are you going to do in this matter? Silvia has gone. She took a suitcase. I can get nothing out of Dulcie but the suitcase. What are you going to do?"

"Nothing, Louisa. Silvia has done it."

"Nonsense. We can go to the depot for that train—that express!"

"They'll be married."

"Dick, she isn't your niece, but she's my brother's child. I cannot be cool."

Uncle Dick looked at his watch: "Go to the depot and see the man," he said. "There are still a few minutes."

"Come with me, then."

Uncle Dick consulted his watch, and said: "Then we must go at once."

And Aunt Louisa tremblingly refastened her veil, saying as she did so: "Exactly like Silvester—he did it just the same way—Oh, I remem-

ber how poor mother worried about him!—And Silvia to repeat it! If it had only been that young man who won the pony race I should not hesitate to say it was all for the best. But no—somebody else—I can't understand it. Who *is* this Buttress?"

Uncle Dick opened the door, and the husband and wife made haste for the depot.

Uncle Dick was remembering Silvia's expression, as she had kissed him good-bye, half an hour ago, and was saying to himself: "If looks are to be trusted, it is all for the best."

CHAPTER XXVIII

“WHAT ABOUT BILL DIN?”

Louis, married to Silvia, had never been so completely astonished with what his father would have called the “happen-so” of life. Silvia did all the talking as they walked to the depot; but he, listening to her, had question after question to ask himself, between whiles, whenever he had the chance.

“She pins her faith to me,” he said; “she lives on it. She throws her destiny in with me, as easily as I would—as I would rise up with the sun. What brings her to me? I love her—so do others—she trusts something deep to come to me like this.”

And then he would say to Silvia: “Still pleased with life, Mrs. Buttress?”

And Silvia’s answer would be: “Better by half,

than it has ever been before. I am now your squaw. Ain't it a dandy day for a long ride on the train? Folks must never guess that we're just married. We'll make them think we're real tired of one another."

And Louis, still thinking about Ari-wa-kis and Din and Spen and what time had done for the hunter, said aloud: "Then do lovers git tired of one another, Silvia—Buttress?"

"The folks who marry to git dollars and houses, and the folks who marry to git the best of someone else, and the folks who marry, cos there ain't anythin' else doin'—they git real tired of one another. We won't, Louis!"

"No," said Louis.

The depot, at three o'clock in the afternoon, was a place of sounds. Louis and Silvia were about to take their seats on the New York train, when something reached them, even though a man with a megaphone was shouting the train's departure. It was Aunt Louisa's exclamation: "There she is, Dick. We've got them!"

Silvia went very pale, and Louis felt her grip his arm, with all her might.

"Louis, hold on to your wife!" she said. "Aunt Louisa!"

Louis Buttress held Silvia's arm tightly.

"Oh, Louis!" whispered Silvia. "Ain't it splendid—I love an adventure!"

Aunt Louisa, followed by Uncle Dick came up to the lovers.

"I have just received a letter in which Silvia says she is married—married—why, she's a child."

"She is my wife," said Louis.

"I'm his wife," said Silvia.

Buttress took Silvia by the hand, and gave her to her uncle.

"I want a word with you alone, Mrs. Sugden," he said.

Uncle Dick and Silvia drew aside, and Louis Buttress immediately turned to Silvia's aunt, whose face was changing colour under the excitement of the moment.

"She and I—we love one another. She's very

young and she likes a game. We've let her have her game. It's pleased her to run away like this. Now all that matters to you, Mrs. Sugden, is the man she's gone with—me. Do you trust me?"

Mrs. Sugden looked into Louis Buttress's face. It was intent. His blue eyes read her, as though he already held the answer. She was silent a minute. Then she said:

"Yes, Mr. Buttress. Well! Good luck to you—it's a game—you'll have to remember *those* words. Good-bye!"

Silvia and Louis now went aboard, leaving Uncle Dick and Aunt Louisa, staring at the great train. A bell was ringing all the time. There was a sound close to Aunt Louisa of a child sobbing and crying. Misery seemed more to the fore than joy. A sense of something uncomfortable near her, made Mrs. Sugden wish that the express had gone, but there was still a minute of silent waiting. At length the train went roaring out of the depot, and people began to move away.

"Don't trouble about it," said Uncle Dick.

"You can't do a bit of good—they would have each other."

"I'm not troubling about anything," said Aunt Louisa. "I'm just depressed."

"So am I," said Uncle Dick. "We'll have to take a honeymoon too."

But, reaching home, they were told by a maid that while they had been away there had been a visitor, who had said that he would not be able to call again.

"What name?" said Mrs. Sugden.

"Mr. Din," replied the girl.

Aunt Louisa sat down into a rocking-chair, and closed her eyes. Uncle Dick looked for his book on forest lore.

CHAPTER XXIX

BILL'S BLOW

IT was a lovely spring evening on the prairie, and the herds of ponies were scampering madly about in the scented air.

Bill Din had returned from Chicago on the same evening of Silvia's wedding-day.

It was time for shutting barn-doors, yet they were still gaping. Bill's eye scanned the whole of it, looking for the figure of his partner, getting about his evening chores, but Toad Lorraine had not begun a single evening duty.

"Gee!" said Bill. "He is a lazy beggar. If I go out he collapses."

He walked into the kitchen in no genial mood, and there he saw Toad Lorraine, seated at the table, an ink-pot before him, a big pen in his hand

and sheets of writing paper beside him. Toad's chin, and his tousle of red hair, in which there was no parting, was all that Bill could see of his partner's head.

"My!" said Bill Din.

There was no answer from Toad.

"For pity's sake!" said Bill. "I'm closin' this ranch to-morrow morning."

Toad dropped his pen and looked up.

"Got to consult me," he said.

He rubbed his pen on his coat sleeve and put it away. Then he glanced at the clock and coloured slightly.

"Seven o'clock and not a single chore done," said Bill. "The cows should have been milked at five. You'd never have milked them if I hadn't got home. Let's get out and do the work."

"What have *you* been doing?" said Toad.
"What did you go to Chicago for? If my partner goes on errands of that sort, I can sure write letters once in a while."

"Once in a while!" said Din. "You've posted

a letter in that mail-box 'bout every day since you came from Chicago, and if you miss writing you're always looking for letters, wastin' time by the hour. It's a darned foolish life you're leadin'."

"That's my business!" said Toad haughtily. "I'm goin' to the mail-box now, before I milk, so if you've letters for your girl, hand 'em out and let them go along of mine."

Bill threw a strap across the room, which hit Toad's legs. Toad returned the bit of leather and put a stamp on his letter.

Bill's lips quivered and Toad was sorry for the fire that had prompted his last speech. He ran out of the kitchen with the letter.

"What's happened to Bill?" he said to himself. Reaching the mail-box, and putting the letter in its place, Lorraine lifted the flag. He had scarcely done so, when he heard a familiar voice, and looking across the fence he saw Spen, riding a chestnut mare.

"Where's Bill Din?" inquired the young man.

"Home," said Lorraine.

"Guess I'll call," said Spen. "Open that gate, the mare don't like standin'."

"Guess you'll not call," said Toad. "What's your news?"

"Buttress' bin married to-day to Silvia Lake!" said Spen. "Sheridan's drunk and boastin' he did it to spite Bill Din—does Din know of it?"

"Course he does, you fool!" cried Toad. "We ain't time to gossip about madmen. Good-night!"

Toad turned on his heel and made for the ranch.

He was in a great rage, and could scarcely conceal it.

"Bill don't know," he said to himself. "He'd be worse than mad if he knew; but he suspects it! Gee! I'm stunned. Never was so surprised in all my life. Buttress to do this! Spen's wrong, maybe; but Spen never is when there's news in the wind. Darn it!" His steps slackened as he came into the yard.

Bill was already milking one of the cows.

"Hurry up!" he called. "Do you want me to git 'em all milked?"

Toad never spoke. He took a pail and a stool, and coaxed a black and white cow to his side. Meanwhile he ruminated on the news.

Bill Din was whistling, "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree," and in the dusk Toad could see his profile.

"He don't know," muttered Lorraine, "and me to tell him! A nice job that, for a man's partner. I ain't goin' to leave 'im to gulp it down in public though."

Din pushed away the red cow, and began milking an uncertain creature, who had a whisky tail. Twice she whisked off his hat, and once she gave him a kick. Toad suspected that the sensitive cow was aware of temper in the milker.

Time went on, and soon the milking was done. The two men came up against each other, near the red barn-door.

"Buttress has married," said Toad.

As soon as he got it out he wished he had mentioned Silvia's name instead; but Din took it up in a second, replying, "Sure! What next?"

"Silvia Lake too!" said Toad.

He heard Din gasp, and then there was silence. Toad felt as if there was a chasm and he could not bridge it, either for himself or his friend.

They stood at the open door of the red barn, in the grey of a dusky evening. To Toad it was an endless time, and then Din, muttering something impossible to understand, was gone into the stables.

"Gee!" said Toad. "I sure wish Buttress joy of the girl—I hope she'll be a shrew of the worst sort, and that they'll fight like cat and dog."

There was nothing left for Lorraine to do, but to go back to the house.

The men never locked the house door, so Toad did not know whether Bill came back or not, but in the morning they met again in the stables.

Toad's spirits went down to zero, as he saw his friend.

"I'm a'goin' off for a few days," said Bill.

His voice was hoarse and he spoke with an effort and Lorraine said, "that's all right—you

don't need to come back until Spennithorne comes next month. Any old time'll do for me."

Bill Din went into the house, and an hour later he was gone.

Toad rushed off to town to get the news. It was true.

CHAPTER XXX

“I’VE DECEIVED HIM”

A CLEARING in a wood in spring time, a swift American spring with increasing sunlight every day, and two people pleasing one another at every turn, and a log-cabin well placed, with a background of pines and a foreground of maples and oaks, even hickory—what more could man or woman want?

Louis Buttress often asked that question. His days were now most extraordinary. Having been alone all his life, he had Silvia at every leisure moment; and the more he studied her, the more surprising was her nature.

She did everything she could to help her husband. She never regretted the solitude of the life. There was not a sign of childishness in any of her actions.

"She's perfect," Louis said to himself. He said it when he went off at early dawn. He said it while he was hunting. He said it when he returned again. He said it when the rain came for three days, and they could not get away from each other. He said it at the beginning of the rainy spell, and re-echoed it when those days had passed away. He never said it aloud. There was no need of it, he thought.

A log-cabin is not a place where housework is likely to take up all the time, but Silvia soon found other occupations and was never idle. The books did not get looked at, but the living creatures in the woods were all fascinating and Louis and Silvia loved them.

Not far away from the cabin there were some crab-apple trees on a grassy mound. Sometimes Louis, returning from the hunt, would find Silvia sitting there.

The grass was growing long and vividly green. The trees were scented with their pink blossoms. Fluttering rosy leaves dropped in the still air.

This break or glade in the midst of the wood, showed the beauties of the deeper, more shadowy parts, where it was darker; and the owls hooted. Both Louis and Silvia enjoyed the birds on these quiet spring evenings. They would sit outside the cabin, listening to the frogs in the creek, feeling the cool airs of night coming up from the water, hearing the rustle of living creatures venturing out in the dark. There were several varieties of owls, calling in their different ways, and making their notes clear on the night air.

Sometimes Louis and Silvia sat outside the cabin watching evening, as it melted into night. The sky might be studded with stars; it might be swept by the moon; it might be soft and misty, with some orange-hued dusky cloud, where the sun had set, but it was received with pleasure. An hour was not wasted in this way.

And Silvia forgot all about Bill Din.

It was one splendid May morning, when the blossoms that had been on the fruit trees were mostly a carpet underfoot. Louis got breakfast

very early. It was more than corn mush, for Silvia prepared it.

Six o'clock on a May morning in the woods is a fine place to start the day, and Mr. and Mrs. Buttress were as merry as could be.

"What time will you git back?" asked Silvia.

"Not till dark," said Louis. "Come with me."

"No, I ain't able to. I've lots to do. I'll have supper ready, though. Say, ain't we lucky? Not a quarrel since we married. Ain't it 'bout time we had a try?"

Louis, who had already got outside the cabin, came in to say: "You make one up, while I'm gone, try!"

"What'll *you* do when you come back?" asked Silvia.

"See what *you* can do," said Louis, going off.

It was already a warm day, although only six o'clock. Silvia, watching Louis go, saw a bluebird fly out of the brake, and into the brush again.

And then she came into the house. She was making a cushion cover, and pulled it out of the

window seat, to take it out into the clearing, and at the same time she gathered up the pieces of patchwork that had fallen out of her basket. Putting them away again she came across an old envelope,—Bill Din's writing.

The cushion cover and the bits for patching fell on the floor, and Silvia went out of the cabin, for she did not like the look of the envelope. And, running out quickly, she found herself held by a man.

"Bill!" she screamed.

"Sure! It's Bill Din! What did you expect? Someone else instead of the man you're promised to?"

Silvia stared at him and he gazed at her.

The sun was pouring down upon the glade. Birds were twittering; the May apple was in blossom, spreading pale green leaves over the grass. Spring was triumphant everywhere.

"Come in," she said.

"You was mighty slow gittin' it out, Silvia Lake!"

"I'm pleased to see you, Bill."

"I'd say it a million times, Silvia, 'twould make it believable!"

Silvia went into the kitchen of the log-house. Bill followed her, bending his head in the doorway, and then looking around him sharply. There were the remains of breakfast on the table, and he glanced at the cups and plates, and again at Silvia. He picked up the envelope which lay on the floor, near the window, and crushed it in his fingers. She went pale, as she watched him throw it in the fire. She stood gazing at him, her lips parted, and her hands clasped together.

"Give me something to eat," he said at last. "I've been fasting two days. I'm going to eat and drink here, and rest awhile. I'm surely right in naming you as Silvia Lake? If I've made a mistake, you tell me—It's Silvia Lake, ain't it?"

Silvia came up to the stove, and tried to move the kettle forward. She was biting her lips, and the fingers that held the handle were not firm. Bill took it and placed it securely.

“Bill,” she said, “ain’t you heard?”

“Heard what?”

“ ’Bout me?”

“If you’ve news for me, tell me what it is?”

“I was married to Louis Buttress—I meant to tell you!”

“Poor Buttress!” said Bill Din.

Silvia took the cups from the table and placed a fresh one for Bill Din. She came close to him several times, when she went to get the dishes, and once, in doing so, she felt something heavy and bulky in his over-all pocket. The shape of it was plain to her eye. She shrank back from him.

“You ain’t happy, Silvia,” he said, “same as me.”

“Bill,” she said. “I done wrong. I see now how I done very wrong. I ask you to forgive me if you can——”

“You ask too much.”

“Then what will you do, Bill?”

“I’ll have a talk with you first over our break-

fast. We'll have this breakfast together, Silvia; and then we'll see what we'll do!"

"Yes," said Silvia.

She placed some more food on the table and poured coffee into a cup.

"Sit down, Bill," she said.

"You," he said.

Silvia sat down opposite him.

"Now we'll talk," he said. "See, you ain't drinkin' nor eatin'—you must do both. We'll drink to Mr. and Mr. Louis Buttress!"

"Don't, Bill!"

"Don't, why?"

"Don't drink to Louis!"

"Why?"

"You're mad with him. 'Tain't right. Drink to me!"

"I'm mad with you!"

"I know. Drink to me. Louis ain't in it."

"What?"

"Louis don't know nothin'."

Bill put his cup down.

"Don't know you was promised to me?—that's nothin'. It don't make any matter—his day is over. He's had it and it's over."

"What are you goin' to do, Bill?"

"Take you from him."

"I'll never leave him."

"I'll kill you—that's what I meant!"

"Then do it."

Bill was silent.

He sat gazing at Silvia. She got up from the table and went to the door.

"What are you thinkin' of?" Bill asked her.

"I wish I'd never been born."

"You ain't the first that's wished it—and you ain't a'goin' to be the last!"

"Bill, only one thing I ask of you, and you may kill me."

"What'll you ask of me, Silvia? What do you want?" He got up from the table and came to the door.

"You did love me once, Bill, though it's all crumbled to pieces. But you did, once. For the

sake of everythin' that's gone, I beg of you, Bill,
to promise me one thing——”

“What's the one thing, then?”

“Keep it to ourselves. And now—kill me!”

“Never let Buttress know? What's the good of
disguisin' the truth? Ain't it better for Buttress
to know he's got a wife that deceives him, than to
think she's what she ain't? I ain't a'goin' to help
you to deceive another man—one's enough—no,
I ain't a'goin' to kill you, neither—it's Buttress
I'll see—’tain't any use dealin' with you—I'm
a'goin' for Buttress—after all, it ain't nothin' to do
with you—it's Buttress and me!”

“Bill! Bill! Come back!”

“It's no use a'callin' me. It's too late.”

“Bill, do you remember nothin' I ever done for
you?—Do you remember what I done for you
when you was a kid? Do you remember I forgive
you for everythin' you did wrong when you
was a boy, 'cos you couldn't help yourself when
it was mischief. I helped you every time! I
screened you in all your troubles! I had pity for

you 'cos you couldn't keep out of it, and I took you for a friend! And now you ain't a bit of pity for me, 'cos I was afraid—and afraid of you——”

“And afraid of Buttress—of the man you've married!”

“I've gone and deceived him, and I daren't see his face when he sees what I am—and you've found it out, Bill, and you've no pity and I don't think I can bear my life any longer—Bill, don't go yet! What are you goin' to do 'bout Louis? Come back! Come back!”

“It's all Buttress, from beginning to end. Let it be Buttress, then!”

Bill Din strode to the door, and from there he stood gazing at her.

“Come back! Come back and listen to me! Louis' nothin' to do with it.”

“Sure thing, you'll learn what you did for me, while you're feelin' for Buttress! Buttress is what you're thinkin' of! 'Tain't anythin' else in this world!—you'll get Buttress now, but you'll not see me again! You ain't broken my heart—

that's a cinch! You've turned it to steel. But-tress shall see me, and you can call me forever—I ain't a'comin' back this way!"

Bill Din ran out of the log-house and Silvia ran also. She could not keep up with him.

"Come back!" she called. "Come back!"

"Never!" said Bill Din.

The sun streamed down upon the unsheltered clearing, so that the grasshoppers and katy-dids made the air alive with their vivid joy. Bob White was too tired to call. The frogs were singing from the creek. Silvia listened to Bill Din's receding footfall.

It died away too soon.

She walked slowly back to the cabin.

CHAPTER XXXI

“DAY NO GOOD!”

M EANWHILE Louis Buttress, having gone due east, came to a place where there was a large pond. Rushes bordered the water's edge, and the music in them was sweet and low. There was a wood of birch trees beyond. The barks were white, and gleamed in the sunlight. There was a scent of pines. Weeds were flowering luxuriantly and the pollen spreading at a touch. There were faint flickings of cloud, more like fluff, floating lightly in the blue heavens.

Louis took stock of the whole scene. There was a deep blue mound, very far away, in a distant peep given by a break in the woods. Hills in the distance, blue with the effect of space, were almost like a dream. A thousand thoughts arose in Louis's mind, surging up and up from his heart.

There was a stream flowing into the wood, and some Indians were encamped on the banks of it, amongst the willow trees—a most desirable spot for pausing. Louis knew them quite well, but to-day they did not let him pass by. The Indian, leaving his squaw sitting by the water edge, came out to meet the hunter, and having got within speaking distance, stopped.

"What news?" asked Louis.

"No news!" said the Indian. "Not much doing."

Buttress shook his head.

"Day good—" he said.

"Not good day," repeated the man.

Louis drew a little nearer, and as the sun was shining into the Indian's eyes, he saw how thought was leaping in the sombre depths of sight.

What was the scheme?

Buttress handed over his gun to his friend. It was certainly interesting. Having come from Lincolnshire in England it was differently made than other guns.

The Indian became engrossed with it.

Louis gazed about him.

So two or three minutes passed, and then the Indian returned the gun, saying: "Hunter good shot—him better go home—nothing doing!"

And at the very moment that this was said, Louis saw Bill Din standing a few yards away from him.

"Bill!" said Louis.

The Indian exclaimed. "Him find hunter—him hunt too—hunter watch—watch out!"

"Why this man is a neighbour. Sure thing, he's a friend!" said Louis.

The Indian remained standing and gazing at Bill Din; and Bill Din, never moving, never speaking, never smiling, remained looking at Louis Buttress.

"Blue-grass go home—" said Louis, suddenly.

"Him stay by hunter."

"Yes," said Louis, "this man and I must talk. We're neighbours."

The Indian moved slowly away, walking very

straight in the direction of the stream. Once he looked back and called out something or another, but his words passed unheeded by both the men. When he was almost out of sight, Louis spoke up: "What's the matter, Bill Din?" was all he said to the pony boy.

Bill moved nearer again, until there was only a yard between them.

"I'm done, clean done out of all—emptied, cheated out of everythin'. You, Louis Buttress, ain't left me one breath o' life worth living!"

Buttress listened. He pondered. He grew dark-looking. Then he ran forward, and seized the pony boy by the arm, as he cried: "Life's done it. Take it like any o' the neighbours wo'ld have done—it's life——"

"To take what ain't yours? To run off with one promised to your friend—friend?"

"Say that again, Bill Din! Say it slow, say it on that life you've loved so much."

"Silvia Lake was promised to me, Louis Buttress."

"Here's me gun!" said Louis. "'Twas m' father's. Me poor ole father's—a good man was me father—kill me with me father's gun, and see what good comes out o' killing."

"Keep your ole gun. I'll not kill you. Did you know she was promised to me? Did you? Did you *not* know? Ain't she tol' you all she done?"

Buttress now fell back, so that even the far-distant Indian, watching under cover, saw something was happening.

Din continued: "You're some surprised, Louis, but it don't matter—this is life—nothin' to it. I got your letter. You ain't gone very far—it don't need a fox to find you out!"

"Bill," said Louis, "it don't matter a cent what you say, it matters what you are. If I'm treacherous, if I don't care a hatchet about me word—and your word—and the word of any—wal'—take it as you like—I never want to see you again. Neither you nor any man!"

"I don't blame you!" said Bill Din.

The pony boy walked swiftly away in the direction of the birch trees, and Louis Buttress, turning slowly round went off towards the place from which he had come—the oak forest. He held his gun in a curious position, almost as if he had never handled one in his life, and his steps dragged, as though he were paralysed with the effort.

And in the far distance the Indian watched him closely, with eyes that saw every movement.

“Day no good!” said Blue-grass, in a monotonous voice.

The squaw listened, and said nothing.

CHAPTER XXXII

“LOVE TRUSTS”

IT was dusk when Louis returned, and Silvia did not go out to meet him.

She was crocheting, sitting on the wooden door-step. He came slowly, with an indifferent, listless movement, which even the shadows of evening could not disguise. He stopped short and looked at her for a moment.

“Take my gun,” he said.

Silvia put down the crochet work, and rose to her feet. She looked into Louis’s eyes, and taking the gun from him, she went into the house.

Louis followed her, and sat down near the stove. Silvia lit the lamp, putting it on the table. She looked at Louis after she had done it.

The light showed the man’s face, and his blue

eyes were strange looking. His hair was dishevelled. Silvia came to the stove.

"You've been too far, Louis," she said, in a low voice.

"Been too far," said Louis, "that's right!"

"I'll get your supper," said Silvia quickly.

Buttress took up the crochet work, and began to unravel it.

Silvia got the supper ready and put coffee on the table. Louis continued to unravel the work.

Silvia moved away from him and went to the door. Night had descended, the sky was brilliant with stars. The dog was barking.

She stared out into the darkness. She began to sob, but stopped herself, looking fearfully towards the kitchen. She came into the room again and stood in front of her husband.

"The wood-box is empty," she said.

Buttress tried to put the fancy work on the table, but the cotton entangled his fingers, and Silvia extricated them from the meshes.

"Empty as the shells near a squirrel's nest,"

he said, but he never stirred from his seat by the stove.

Silvia left him again, and went to the door. And she came out into the clearing, wringing her hands, and saying: “I’ve done for his happiness—this man’s too big for me.”

There was a great rustling among the trees and the creepers. Silvia came back to the kitchen. He was sitting in exactly the same position as she had left him.

His forehead was furrowed.

She put some wood on the stove, and there was a roaring and crackling, as it splintered up in the heat. The dog, hearing it, came into the house, wagging his tail, and walking around Buttress. Silvia came too.

“What have I done? Tell me of it! Louis, name it!”

He turned his head slowly, until he was looking at her, and his eyes were wide open: “What about Bill Din?”

Silvia’s eyes went roving here and there, all over

the big kitchen, but they eventually came back to her husband. Her lips moved, but no words formed themselves. The clock was ticking, and the wood occasionally crackled in the stove, while the outdoor sounds came in more faintly.

"Speak, Louis," she cried at last. "Speak, or I'll die! Tell me what I am and say you love me no more!"

"How much did you trust me when you gave yourself to me?" said Buttress. And he got up and went out into the clearing.

Silvia clung to the table, for she was unable to keep her feet for a few minutes.

Louis was outside, talking to the dog.

She went into the bedroom. The window of this room looked out upon the oak trees. Some small trees even tapped the glass panes. The moon was rising. She sat down on the window seat and after a while she fell asleep.

The cocks crowed at three o'clock, then stopped as if they had made a mistake, and did it again, with more life, at five.

The dawn was beautiful. There were some bright clouds, where the day was coming, and then, very early, the sun plunged upon the world. The wood awoke to another morning, and the sounds became manifold—the birds using a medley of notes, and growing more vehement in the warmth of the hour. Silvia, stiff with sitting in the window, came into the kitchen.

Buttress was outside the door, busy with some tools, and the dog was with him.

Silvia clenched her hands, as she saw it, and when the dog came in for some breakfast, she pushed him from her, and sent him whining out-of-doors.

“What’s that for?” called Louis.

“For hate!” cried Silvia.

“Come here,” said Louis to the dog, and he began to fondle it.

Silvia stood a moment motionless. Then, putting her fingers in her ears, she screamed.

Buttress threw away the tools. He came into the kitchen and watched her.

She had thrown down the knife she had been using. She was pale as death.

He came up to her, and took hold of both of her hands.

"Bill should have killed me," she said.

Buttress still held her hands.

"And not left me to this——"

"Left you to what, Silvia? Think, think what you've done!"

"Anyhow, it's done!" said Silvia. "My life's been nothin' but a lot of mistakes from beginning to end. I can't help it. It ain't any use!"

"Whose blame is it? Reason it out!"

"Reason ain't everythin'—brains ain't the limit o' things! It's done, while I've been finding things out—" Silvia stopped suddenly, and looked at the wooden ceiling.

"Couldn't have helped it!" reflected Buttress. "Sure thing, you've something to awake to!"

"You don't love me. For pity's sake, tell me!" cried Silvia.

"You ain't trusted me," said Buttress. "After

all them beautiful days spent together, it's meant that Bill Din was in your thoughts——”

“Louis, you don' know nothin'—neither you nor Bill!”

“Bill Din was the man you was thinkin' of—not me! You held it back from me! Bill knew more about you than me.”

“Everythin' goes against me,” said Silvia. “When I seen you I'd been trying the road of life to find a way—it was like feeling out in the dark—till I seen you—and after I had known *you*, Louis, I said to myself: ‘There's my road!’ That's what I thought, no more!”

“And before you seen me, what about Bill and the road!”

Silvia pulled her hands from Louis's grasp.

“Silvia!” he persisted. “Why not a' told me? Love trusts!” continued Buttress.

Silvia shuddered.

“Love trusts!” he repeated.

“I must tell you everythin',” said Silvia, “now when it's too late. I was afraid if I spoke about

Bill, you'd go away forever. Louis, I was a'sayin' to myself: 'There's my happiness!' and I said to myself—'He'll think of Bill Din—he'll maybe think more of a man that's neighboured him than a bit of a girl like me.' Louis, that's how I thought it out. I never thought of Bill, I was a'thinkin': 'This is the man for me.' I was a'sayin' to myself: 'Here he is—' Do you believe me, Louis?"

"But Bill—Bill didn't frighten you. 'Twas me that frightened you—me!"

"I was frightened I'd lose you."

"Bill was your chum."

"Nothin' but a chum. We were in the same grade."

"Bill understands you!"

"No, he don't, Louis."

Buttress turned away from her and went out of the house.

Silvia sank down upon the floor, and covered her face with her hands.

The dog, forgetful of unkindness, came and licked the fingers pressed close against the face.

CHAPTER XXXIII

“TRUST ME”

THE coming of evening brought Louis Buttress into the clearing. It was almost dark in the wood, but here, near the log-house, there still lingered some of the afternoon's light.

The birds were chorusing loudly.

He saw an owl peering at him from an oak bough, and as he looked the bird drooped, heaped itself together, and gave a clumsy lurch. Buttress thought it was about to tumble, but it flew heavily over his head, as he went towards the house, calling in its odd way.

The cabin door was partly open.

Louis entered the kitchen and found it very dark, for the windows gave only a broken light. The dog greeted him but Silvia was nowhere to be seen.

He went into the bedroom.

She was not there.

Buttress lit a lamp, and carried it everywhere, but he could find nothing to help him.

"What has she done?" he said.

The dog almost spoke in answer to this inward thought from Louis. He whined in a knowing way, and cocked one ear.

The fire was out in the stove. The ashes were white and cold. Buttress looked in the wood-box, and saw a letter lying there.

He got hold of it, and walked to the window, to read it by the last bit of daylight.

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DEAR LOUIS:

I want you to remember that I was afraid of losing you, 'tis all I can say for myself. I've played the game wrong and I'm surely beaten. I tell you, Louis, we don't know nothing that we ought to know when we begin to play at life and 'tis more a bit of good luck that pulls us through, than our management, and I don't blame the unlucky ones. I don't blame any one but the country for leaving everything important to go to pieces!

You ain't a bit of knowledge of me, and I don't blame you; but you're kinder to your dog than to me,

'cos you know his ways. I'm leaving you for a while,
'tis far better considering what I done.

You try and think me out and it will may be help some, in explaining lots of riddles. I've had reason to think about men, they've caused me such difficulties. But I'll own up, Louis, that you never caused me a minute of anything but joy till this of Bill Din come out. If I'd only let it out at the proper time but I never do things when I should do, they come to me afterwards. I know now that there's nothing to be afraid of in you! Alas, I know so late! Now, Louis, I'll be real sensible and go to Ari-wa-kis, and study my conduct, and be ready to see you—should you care to look me up—in six months' time, but not before, *for any reason excepting a life or death matter—which may God preserve you from!* And, Louis, trust me as you did before, it's wanted more than ever.

SILVIA.

P.S. What's the use of studying dead languages and ancient history? You said it yourself in the desert.

N.B. And natural history should begin with ourselves.

Louis, having read the letter, put it in his pocket
He took his gun, called the dog, and came out of
the log-house.

He shut the door and locked it, and went off towards the oak forest.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BILL AND TOAD PART

BILL DIN came into the yard one Friday evening. He went into the stables.

Toad Lorraine was packing a suitcase, and heard him.

"Gee!" was his remark, "there's Bill!"

The chores were all done, and it was not seven o'clock. Everything was in order, yet the colour flooded Toad's face, and he found it difficult to finish packing the suitcase.

He looked at the kitchen door. He could hear Bill coming towards the house.

Toad lit the lamp, and put it on the table. He sat down near the stove and unrolled a newspaper. Bill opened the door and stood looking at him.

Toad read the newspaper.

Bill Din came in and walked up to the table.
He lowered the wick of the lamp.

"Put it out!" said Toad meaningly.

Bill did so.

He stumbled over the suitcase, and Toad laughed sarcastically.

"What's *this* blamed thing?" said Bill.

"Only waitin' for you to git back, and I'm runnin' off for a day or two," Toad replied.

"Only waitin' for you and me to break our necks. Light the lamp and let's see what you're a'doin'. Gee, what's this? A pair of shoes! A hair brush!"

Toad Lorraine seized the match-box and struck a match. He purposely allowed it to go out and began with another one. He found it so difficult to tell Bill Din.

"I'm a'goin' away for a week—I'm about to be married——"

"Git the lamp lit!" ordered Bill Din.

Toad Lorraine did so.

Having burnt his fingers, and muttered, "Gee-whizz!" he looked at his partner.

"Have you any news?" inquired Bill. "I mean—real business."

"Bill Din, I ain't a'goin' to be downed by this kind of talk! We ain't in a mood to bear much—neither of us—we'll be in deep waters if we ain't careful! I'm about to marry, and question is, am I to be partner with you, staying along here at the old place, same as we've done since we was youngsters, or am I—or do you wish—to walk off with half shares, and set up alone? That's the question! Far as I can see—just lookin' at it, as things stand between us!—any other question is darned interference!"

"Name the bride!" said Bill Din.

"Miss Martin," said Toad Lorraine proudly. Bill Din smiled.

"'Course," he said, "I can bring her up to my mind now you mention her! Let's see—Miss Martin was at the races—allow me to remark, Toad Lorraine, you're the first man she's ever met!"

"That's more'n can be said for the most of them!" said Toad, fiercely.

A queer expression came over Din's face. It was as if, quite suddenly, he grew tired of the argument. He sat down on the nearest chair, and Toad watched him furtively.

Bill Din was asleep in five minutes.

A look of compunction came over Toad's face, as he studied the figure of his partner.

"It's a darned mix-up!" he said. "I wish the pair of us had kept clear of Chicago. What's the poor fellow to do without me? Yet I can see 'tis no use—he don't like women no more, and who can blame him? I'll make a bee-line while he's sleepin'." Toad got up, and walked towards the door, but recollecting the suitcase, he came back again. "It ain't a bit of use—now or never—Bill and I must start afresh, or cry quits!"

Lorraine watched Din, as he dozed and dreamed in the hard-backed chair; until, as suddenly as he had gone to sleep, the pony boy grew wide awake. He blinked his eyes, and then looked

straight at Toad. Lorraine felt his whole heart rise up to welcome his friend.

"Toad," said Bill.

"Sure," said Lorraine, heartily, "whatever you've got to say, Bill, say it. I ain't partickler."

"I pity you!" said Bill.

"You can surely do as you please," said Toad, "it's a free country." But for all his words, he looked unhappy.

"Miss Martin's parents are small millionaires," continued Bill.

"So they are!" said Toad. "No one knows that fac' better'n me."

"Course you'll have talked it over with Poppa and Momma?" There was a heavy silence; to Toad it weighed ponderously.

"No," he said. "Fac' is, Miss Martin don't like things done all in order. She fancies adventure—she ain't had enough—in fac' she's had none—I sure sympathize. I'm goin' to see she has plenty. We're goin' to do the marriage right to her fancy. That's why we're runnin' away—

we're going to Florida—a place she knows of—and then, she—what are you staring at?"

"If you marry Miss Martin as a runaway, we'll quit it!" said Bill Din.

Toad sprang to his feet.

"Gee-whizz! Bill Din, I've put up with you till I'm sick! We'll close this ranch. We'll end it to-night!"

"Where shall we begin?" said Bill. "In the stables?"

"Right! You think I'm after the dough, Bill Din? That's all you know about your partner! I ain't a'goin' to take a pin's worth of goods from her people—and you know it! But life don't show itself very good to you, at this particular moment——"

"It don't!" said Bill. "Neither in one way nor another. I consider we're all fools."

"Oh," said Toad, "pleased you think yourself one!"

"All fools, in the one place we don't think it!"

"That's right!" said Toad, "but we've no time

to talk, for I'll git away to-night, I couldn't lay my head on a pillow in this makeshift buildin'—I sure think life is altogether and completely disappointing! I tell you, you may have every blamed bit of your way in the disposal of our shares of things—yep, Bill Din, the man that's after the dough in Chicago, leaves his partner what he pleased out of the ranch! Say! How does that sound?"

"Do you think that a girl, brought up in luxury, who knows you 'bout as well as I know——"

Bill paused, and Toad was just going to speak again, when, somehow, he also remained silent.

"Wal,'" said Bill, recovering himself, "what was I a'sayin'? 'Twas 'bout Miss Martin. You both write pages to each other. You met for a few minutes. Who'll tire first? Somethin' tells me t'will be you, 'cos you're the spunky one!"

Toad's colour deepened. He felt there was some truth in this remark.

"We're breakin' up, I s'pose?" he said coldly.

"Sure!" said Bill. "Such things as the horses we can deal with any time, and as to the house, I'll buy the whole thing up, furniture just as it stands, it'll do me for life. There's somethin' simple about it, I kinder like—I'll have Gregson come in and set prices and see it all fair—so you can go now if you feel like it."

Toad picked up the suitcase and walked to the door. He stopped to put on coat and hat, and then he was gone.

Bill Din remained sitting very straight in the hard-backed chair. Toad was very busy with horse and buggy. He was a long time doing this work, and fumbled over the harness. The moon rose while he did it.

He hesitated, standing in the yard, looking at the horse. He bit his lips.

Finally he went back to the house on tip-toe, and peered into the kitchen. Bill Din was asleep again.

"He'd sleep in a tornado!" said Lorraine, going

back to the buggy in a furious temper. "Much he cares about his partner—after five solid years, day in, day out—he sleeps it off!" He jumped into the buggy and drove out of the yard.

CHAPTER XXXV

“WE CAN CHANGE OUR MINDS”

BERTHA MARTIN stood in the depot about eleven o'clock on Saturday morning.

The thick white veil she wore over her fair face, disguised it from passers-by.

It took Toad Lorraine about five minutes to discover her. He remembered her by her small, rather nervous fingers. She was playing with a rose-coloured scarf she wore around her neck, and it was this undecided action which reminded him of the afternoon following the races. He came up to her.

Bertha immediately lifted her veil, and looked at him.

“Pleased to see you again,” said Toad.

He put his suitcase down beside her.

“I’m quite all right, thank you,” said Bertha.

Toad wondered how he had talked to her on that afternoon in the spring. There seemed nothing to say. He looked at his watch.

"Got away all right?"

"Perfectly," said Bertha.

They remained standing together in silence for a long five minutes.

Toad's foot beat a tattoo and he yawned, but Bertha was motionless.

"The train west goes in two hours," said Toad.

"Let's have a spanking good lunch before we——"

"I lunched before I left," interrupted Bertha.

"That's good!" said Toad cheerily. "Say, hadn't you better put that veil down, case some of your folks was in the depot?"

Bertha put the veil down. It clung about her small features as if it were damp, giving a rather rabbit-like look to her profile.

Toad spoke again: "We'd better get to work and be married."

"Mr. Lorraine, I feel I don't know how to begin —I'm certain I can't marry you to-day."

Toad gave her a glance.

"Mr. Lorraine, I'm perfectly certain I can't get married to-day. I want to talk to you. I want a long sensible talk with you. We certainly don't know each other, as we ought to do, considering the step we've been contemplating. I think we've let our pens run away with our common sense."

"Right!" said Toad. "You're in order, Miss Martin—mine's the blame for over-haste—always so with my coloured hair. Say, how would you like a trip into the country? We'd talk it out—talk it out to a good purpose, I believe."

"It would be perfectly lovely!" said Bertha. "O, don't mind me if I can't say a word for a while. The last two days I've been thinking about life so much that now I can't think at all—I've kept it all to myself—from Momma—and Alderly and Percy—I think Percy kinder guessed something——"

"Percy and Alderly are your brothers?" inquired Toad. "I see—what about our suitcases? Shall we leave them in Chicago? That's

best. Now enjoy yourself to the full, Miss Martin, and take a day off from your folks. Forget they raised you, and let's have a good time. And don't be nervous—it's a perfectly free country—we can change our minds. Gee! Think of your friend, Miss Lake!"

"I surely have thought of her, Mr. Lorraine. I wept when I thought of Mr. Din!"

"Bill? He's in the best way I ever seen him, since we was partners! Bill don't care—not in the least. You see, Miss Martin, everything takes its place in a kind of order, which prepares us for change. Nothin' stands still in this world—change is the whole value of life!"

"I'm grateful to hear you say so," said Bertha. "I've scarcely slept at all this week. I've been near a brain fever, feeling the momentous step driving me onwards."

"We'll not be driven!" said Toad. "They may be in books, Miss Martin, but in life it's the shoe on the other foot."

Bertha continued: "I'd like to think I'd got no

relations for a whole week, and see how things happen——”

“Oh, they’d happen all right,” said Toad. “But I hope you’ll find this day full of happenings, even though it’s only a good sensible talk between ourselves. Now I ain’t a’goin’ to speak another word after we git on the cars. You must just rest. And when we git into the country, we’ll talk big about life, see? I’ll burn all your letters if you wish it!—Sure.”

“Perfectly lovely!” said Bertha. “I’ll do the same with yours, Mr. Lorraine, and we’ll just have a sensible talk about it—about how we came to agree—to—to——”

“And you shall order it, and settle what we’ll do!” said Toad. And ruminating on the cars, he grew solemn and careworn, having the ranch on his mind.

“Bill’s bested me,” he said to himself. “Maybe I’ll git even yet. If Miss Martin don’t throw me the mitten before the day’s out—I’ll give up my country!”

CHAPTER XXXVI

BILL AND TOAD MAKE UP

"**I** WONDER what Bill's done," was Toad's thought. "Has he fixed up to git along without me?"

The journey across the desert, in the sweltering heat of a summer's day, had only one aspect for Bill's partner. He saw it all in a dream, the background to his anxiety; but for itself, it had no meaning.

He met Spen in Alamanca Creek and got no satisfaction from him. He heard that Bill Din was civil to nobody.

"You'll go crazy if you live with him," said Spen. "*You* quit it, and join me! Gregson's sold me part of his land and there's black jack only wants the dollars to turn it into a gold mine."

"A horse is my fancy," said Toad. "Good-bye."

Lorraine parted with the man who had brought him across the desert: and decided to walk to the ranch.

The fact was painful. He was no longer a part of the place; and he must feel his way into Bill's house.

The corn was all at its best, and the children at the Dutch farm were hiding in it, for their mother wanted them for bed. The sun was so red where it was setting that it gave the prairie a curious colour, a bloodlike purple. The sweet clover made Toad sneeze loudly, as he came into the yard, and Gin-fly neighed on hearing him.

"Poor ole brute welcomes me," said Toad, "but Bill's nature is different. One thing go wrong with Bill, and he pays us all off."

Toad went into the kitchen, and stopped at the door.

Bill Din was preparing to go riding.

"Hello," said Toad.

Bill put his foot on a chair, and rubbed his shoe with some straw he had picked off the floor.

"I congratulate you," he said.

"Why?"

"You look so happy," said Bill.

"'Twas *she* jilted *me*," said Toad. "She don't it."

"You don't mean to tell me that you ain't married."

Toad shook his head.

"My best wishes."

"Keep the change!" said Toad carelessly.

He stood against the door, with an embarrassed expression in his eyes, while Bill, having got his shoe to his fancy, rose to his full height and faced his late partner.

"Darn you!" cried Toad, grinding his teeth.

"Sure!" said Bill. "Blame your feelin's on me!"

"There's a devil in you, Bill Din! You drive me crazy with your ways!"

"I ain't had an ill word with any one since you went off—I ain't spoken to a soul—'cept the creatures in the stables, and a few hogs. I'm goin' ridin'."

Bill came to the door, but Toad's rage was too great to stay within his heart. He seized Bill by the shoulders, and called out: "If you've got a temper, I've got one too. If you've got trouble, and it's made you mad, I've got it too. Was the globe made for you, Bill Din? Did the Almighty God mean you to be happy, more'n the rest of us? See here, look at me, I have my troubles, same as you——"

Bill burst out: "Light as that cotton weed down there that's a'blowin' the seeds all over the yard at this present moment! I'll bet you a fiver, Toad Lorraine, that you'll be drivin' out another girl in less than a week!"

"Course!—you're the only one that stays fixed, ain't you, Bill? Sure thing, I know better'n any man in Alamanca that all the love you've got is in your pride in yourself. Did you know it? Your pride's bigger than anythin'—your pride's your god—what do you know about lovin'——"

"I know nothin' of it—I've never seen any in this world—'cept perhaps a mother to her kid—

there's a bit of natural, faithful feelin' there—but I ain't you, and I'll never be like you! We should never 'a' been partners——”

“Never been partners!” said Toad. “A quarrel or two don't spoil red-headed friendship.”

Bill had got outside the door now. His hand came out, and he pulled Toad's coat sleeve, rather roughly.

“You git into the house, and leave me alone—and don't talk to me! Five years ago we started all right, each livin' to himself, and sharin' the ranch. Let's git back to the old happy style—See? When you read signs, take 'em, and ride out of my way!”

Din went off now, and Toad stood watching him go. The sun's beauty had faded, but a lovely clear moon, like a sickle, had risen over the prairie. Beside her was a star or two. Lorraine, facing the soft undulating waving grasses, beamed at the moon, putting his hands deep into his pockets, as he said to himself:

“He wants me, sure thing, he's missed me! I see

it as plain as that moon! Gee-whizz, we'll have the ole times, and no mistake. We'll have the time of our lives yet, see if we don't!"

He went into the house, and was oppressed with the dismal atmosphere.

"Kinder gits me," said Toad, "'twould make a man blue to look round at Bill's things. Same time, spite of Bill's faithfulness, tain't me, nor another man can make the poor fellow natural. Tain't a bit lucky to be like Bill! I'm kinder sure that seein' what it was—No, I ain't able to do more'n live beside him."

Toad Lorraine unpacked his suitcase.

CHAPTER XXXVII

“BOUND BY FAITH”

HAL ROBBS, sitting at the door of the tent, was dictating to his secretary.

This work went forward briskly until the darkness fell, when the leader of the Expedition into Red Indian Psychology told his workman that he might go.

“Send for John D. Scale,” he said.

The secretary went out and Robbs took out a pipe, lit it, and began to puff out the smoke, watching the curls of grey cloud widen, as they sought the evening air.

Robbs was in a predicament. He had set to work to understand the Indian, and he was baffled —there was something bigger than a continent

between himself and his object. Robbs thought it must be the ignorance of the Indian.

John D. Scale made his presence known by the snapping of twigs, and the moving of leaves.

He was a thin downcast man, with a cast in one eye.

"Sit down, Scale. I hear you made a discovery this afternoon?"

Scale nodded his head.

"A man," he added.

"A man who can talk with the Indians, eh?"

"That's right," said Scale.

"Did you talk with the man?"

"I did."

"Why didn't you bring him to me?"

"Ee ain't amenable," Scale said. "Ee's a bird with all his wings whole."

"What's that mean?"

"Ee's a wild one wot loves the woods. Ee's an odd soul."

"We must doctor his soul, eh, Scale?"

"Try," said Scale, sadly.

"We must clear away difficulties. A man is worthy of his hire. If you'll get the man, you'll have one hundred dollars, Scale!"

Scale scrambled to his feet: "Twenty pounds, ain't it? 'Twould buy my passage back to England four times over!"

"Get him as fast as you can!" said Robbs.

Scale went away with a commotion. The oppressive joy of the hundred dollars made him run under the trees.

"The Penitentiary!" said Robbs, watching him go, "but a good man for me—he's meeker than a mouse!"

Robbs hastily penned a paragraph for the leading newspapers. It ran as follows:

The remarkable book in preparation, *Red Indian Psychology*, is in the trustworthy hands of Hal Robbs, the famous mind-reader. Nothing is being spared to render the book the last word on this fascinating race. It is whispered that Robbs has procured the co-operation of a man who has spent his life entirely in the woods—one who has penetrated into the mysterious clouds of the Indian's mental horizon. . . .

John D. Scale was as glad as the evening, and it was a lovely close to a long, sunny day.

“Buy my passage back to England four times over!” he was saying to himself, as he made his way through the wood. “Wot a good thing I ‘ave a habit of roamin’!”

Louis Buttress was surprised to see a man emerge into the clearing. He had met John D. Scale the day before, and had talked with him. The melancholy of the poor fellow had found an answering chord in the hunter’s heart, and what was still more serviceable, the conversation had driven away a weary army of questions, which Louis’s mind never failed to give him during these long August days.

Buttress was going towards the oak forest, but was brought to a full stop.

“I’ve come back!” said Scale.

He clasped his hands and gave Louis a weird look.

“Ain’t you all on your lonesome?” continued Scale. “There’s nobody nor nothin’ to keep you from ‘elpin’ us. I want you to come along and see

our boss. He's a lot to say to you, for he's a friend of the Indians, and he knows you like them."

"What's he doing?"

"Writin' a book all abart 'em. 'Ee wants you to give him a note here and there. It'll be a fine piece of work for you, and no trouble in it. I've taken a particular fancy to you, can't say why, but I 'ave—if you ain't anythin' partickler on hand, try the job."

"I'll try it," said Buttress.

So the two men set off for Robbs's camping-ground.

Robbs was just about to "turn in," as the night was growing chilly, but the news that the man had been secured kept him out a little longer.

He looked at Buttress.

"So—you're a friend of the Indians?"

"Sure," said Louis.

"Know 'em right off?"

"Sure."

"Can you fathom them before they act?"

Buttress paused.

"Can *you*?" he asked at length.

"No—that's what I want you for. The other day, an Indian promised to meet me at a certain spot by the stream. We were to have a great talk—see? All was straight as a ruler, I was there at the time—so was the Indian——"

"And it didn't come off?" said Buttress.

"He might as well have been dumb. Afterwards, I found I'd given him information instead of getting any from him! He used it against me, and I want to catch him for punishment. I expect he's in this neighbourhood."

"Very likely he's in the grass beside you," said Louis.

It was dark now, the moon out, the stars faintly shining, and the weeds rustling. Robbs got up from his seat.

"You think so? How do they do it?"

"They ain't out of touch with Nature, that's all! What do you want me to do?"

Robbs was quiet for two minutes. He was summing up the importance of the occasion. The

book was lagging, and here, in his presence, was the kind of man who could give him everything he wanted, so, after a rapid calculation Robbs said: "I want you to find this man and tell me where he is. Not only that, to give me all the information you have about Indians. I ask you to give yourself to me and you shall be well paid. I promise you a share in the book, a portrait of yourself as a frontispiece, and a big name as a student of men. I'll take you to the big cities and show you up. I lecture and I'll show you as a man who has made a real study of the woods. I'll furnish you with money to do this work. I'll make you! Name your price."

"Indians have no price," said Buttress.

"What? Don't understand money? Still, something holds them to their friends, eh?"

"Where is the man that don't hold to his friends?" said Buttress.

"They trust you—anyway! You must use it for the benefit of mankind. A good book on the Indian is wanted. You must help me to produce it."

"By what means?"

"By *all* means, Buttress. That's how men get on!"

Hal Robbs spoke with emphasis. He came up to Buttress and laid his hand on his shoulder.

The hunter shook him off: "Nothin' on the face of this earth would induce me to listen to you. I was tol' you was a history writer, and liked Indians. If I named this pantomime work in its true colours I'd a-say these poor fellows was all a cinematographing, to make a dollar bug out of you! If an Indian gives me the best of himself, in all good faith, I'm bound by faith to give the best to him. What have you given me? Your character. Your want of it, I might say. You'd take my knowledge, secured at the price of a heart innocent of trickery, and you'd use it to furnish up your lies! And there'd be me, the hunter, fooled by the sneak, exposing the Indian to the gaping crowds in the big cities. And it wouldn't be the real Indian, neither, but the horrible result of innocence and falsehood.

I never want to see the trash you write—I'll go and live with the Indians!"

But even as Buttress walked off from Robbs he was seized by two men. One of them was the unfortunate John D. Scale.

"Bind him! He's a tough man," said Robbs, carelessly. "Fasten him to the oak tree. Tell the Swede we want him. He's a man of muscle."

Buttress, seeing the impossibility of getting away, allowed himself to be bound, but all the time he was watching John D. Scale. The unfortunate fellow was looking crookedly at him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“BILL AND ANNE”

MRS. BUTT was the new teacher at No. 10, a school about three miles from Alamanca Creek. She was an Englishwoman, and it was her first experience of America, so she was enjoying the country very much.

No. 10 was situated about a mile from the horse ranch.

Her favourite pupil was Fanny Eden, a girl of about twelve, the oldest of a family of nine, and Bill Din had lately taken Ambrose Eden, Fanny's nine-year-old brother, to be chore-boy at the ranch.

Mrs. Butt had been married very young, and her husband had died within the year, and when the widow was able to think of the future she had felt the wisdom of taking a complete change.

She had been only a few months in America when her duties came to an end, for the time being, with the early summer holidays. Mrs. Butt did not go away. She took many a ramble in the woods, and over the rolling pasture-land.

When a country and climate are unknown, it is well to be guided by the natives, yet Anne Butt found herself constantly forgetting this, thinking she was in England, and judging the clouds by the old familiar signs of home.

Several times she was overtaken by the dark, forgetting the absence of dusk in this new country; and one Saturday in early June she was caught by an electric storm, when about a mile from home.

A man, driving a team of frightened horses, pulled up for a moment, to advise her to get into shelter at once. He pointed in the direction of some big frame buildings. "The men there have got a root-house, and you can git a ride after the worst is over."

So Anne took a path along the edge of an Indian

corn patch. The corn was very green and getting waist high. It was a beautiful sight.

By and by the prairie came in view, and in some ways the waving grass resembled the sea. It lay beyond the ranch, the group of feeding ponies being the only break in the vista.

Anne felt that she could not run, even if the storm killed her, so she went forward slowly, beginning to distinguish the rattle of thunder, booming nearer and nearer, in a growing, darkening, swiftly moving cloud.

Then came a silence all around her. If a leaf moved, it moved individually, as though it spoke. Leaves whispered separately. The hiss of an insect was like a boiling kettle. Not a bird uttered a sound. The ground rattled under the feet, sending off crumbs of broken red mud, dried to a cake, and parched for water. Then a cool whisper of the enemy smote Anne on the cheek, and gave her an inward shiver. It was an uncanny flutter of wind, like a remnant from some fearful whole whirlwind. She saw a handful of red dust whirl

round and round in a mad dance, and she realized that there was death in this storm.

So she began to run, and at length found herself at a gate, which was tied by a piece of old rope. She climbed the bars with a swiftness born of necessity, and sped across the immense bare yard. As she crossed, the chickens pushed right and left, screaming with terror, and searching for shelter, bobbing their heads in hot haste.

She had reached the door of a house and as she threw it open, she felt the force of the wind driving behind her. She tried to shut the door again. A man came and flung his weight against it; and she heard a roar and a hiss, and the storm was upon the yard.

So they stood thus, both at the door, listening to the whirling, swirling wind and rain, beating like thousands of whips over the desolate yard.

It was far too swift an onslaught of water to find a home in the ground. Rolling and leaping from the parched land, the rain formed torrents of water that splashed and ran madly in every direction.

“Could we not open the door?” asked Anne.

“Give it a minute!” said the man.

He beat time with his foot, as though he were counting the minute, and Anne saw that he was puzzled with her sudden appearance.

“I come from the schoolhouse, No. 10,” she said. “I was directed here. I have been into the country, and I forgot how quickly your storms come up.”

“Are you Mrs. Butt?” asked the man.

“Yes,” said Anne.

“Oh,” said he.

He relapsed into silence, but added, “When my partner comes in, he’ll take you over there. Can you ride?”

“Oh, yes,” said Anne eagerly.

“Then if you do—you can have a pony I’ve been taking charge of. I meant to send it away before this. You can take it, and my partner will see you there.”

And now Bill Din opened the door, and Anne stepped out a little way, looking upon the miracu-

lous change. The rain was still like a battery charge, a grey onslaught of water through which the lightning played, like a pair of shining scissors opened and shut in swift action; but the yard was a *mêlée* of water, mud, sticks, wood, straw, and even branches of trees.

The man went out, and ran in the direction of the barns and stables, while Anne returned to the bare room. There was very little to look at; there was a wooden table, capable of seating a dozen big people, and it held a sack of flour. It was a white bag, bearing in blue letters the words "Alamanca Creek Self Raising Flour," and a blue star below it.

A cat walked under the table, moving skilfully in and out of sundry boots, leggings, shoes, and straps. Anne sat down by the empty stove, thinking of the storm.

Bill came back again: "The horses are safe," he said. "They're sweated with work, and they're easy prey."

He sat down and pulled out two books from a drawer to his hand, at the table.

“Sorry you’ve to wait in such a place, but it don’t fall in my line to help you out; my partner’s the man—that selling of horses and seeing to folks is *his* work.”

“I am glad to rest,” said Anne.

So Bill took his books out, and began to work at them. He and Toad had started afresh, and they had made a sweep of the old books.

By and by the rain stopped and Anne wanted to go, but recollecting the pony saddling, she looked again at the man who stuck to his own line of work. He was a sad-looking fellow. And Bill, thinking of Star, left the books and with his lean finger, he patterned out the big letters on the bag of flour; and over and over again his fingers found their way from Alamanca Creek to the blue star, and from the star to Alamanca Creek.

He was wondering how many more of these thunderstorms, how many more wintry blizzards he must see through, how often he must rise up and lie down again, before all was done. He had seen people pick up their lives, as easily as the

wind carried the straw in the late storm; but others who saw reality as it was, without glamour, must know, long before they were dead, that it was a losing game—from beginning to end, a failure.

And then, finishing the lettering of the bag once again, the lean finger hesitated in its action; and Bill slowly turned his head.

He saw Anne looking at him.

It was a terribly strange experience for a desperate fellow to meet those eyes.

Bill looked away, and so did Anne, but he felt as if he must not move, lest he broke the spell. Bill remained sitting in absolute silence, not moving now, but wondering what had happened to him.

He felt as if his troubles had all been met and carried away for ever.

He felt as if he had been riding on a race-horse to old age, but that someone had unsaddled him, and taken him—

Bill's lips twitched, and with a tremendous effort he got up and went out of the kitchen.

As soon as he had gone, the tears came into

Anne's eyes, and she rubbed them quickly away, and went to the looking-glass, and put her hat and veil on, and fastened them securely with pins and bows, and made herself ready to go.

"I'll take you," said Bill, appearing at the door.
"I'm ready."

Anne came out, and saw Star, who whinnied at her, and was pleased to be petted by a lady. Then Bill Din helped the lady to mount, and got up on the sorrel mare; and the horses went slowly splash-ing through the mud.

They never spoke to one another. They rode slowly through the fragrant air, listening to the tumultuous voices of water. The birds had begun to try their special notes again, and the journey, which lay in the opposite direction to the prairie, took Anne upon a beautiful tree-shaded road, hedged in with weeds and sweet clover. Red mud might hamper them all the way, but water dripped from oaks and maples. Oaks were everywhere, like hawthorns in England, and the mocking bird sang in ecstasy.

Reaching the schoolhouse, which was situated at the crossing of four roads, Bill dismounted and opened the gate, leading to the Eden place. It lay about a quarter of a mile below the school, in a hollow, amongst the trees. Mrs. Butt's frame cottage was to the left, but nearer No. 10.

"If you want a horse for riding—use one of ours—it'll do 'em good," said Bill. "Keep Star until I send another in her place—Eden will take charge of her."

"Thank you," said Anne.

And Bill Din got up on the sorrel mare and cantered away into the mud and slush.

"'Twas strange," said he, "an angel couldn't be more meaning."

CHAPTER XXXIX

BILL TELLS ANNE

M R. and Mrs. Eden were always at work when they were up, and they slept well at night. The children had no luxuries, yet they thrived splendidly—the only one who was in any way put upon by her parents' difficulties in rearing a big family, was Fanny, and Mrs. Butt, realizing that the poor child was sometimes so sleepy she could not do her work at school, had arranged to keep her with her, when lessons began again.

Mrs. Eden said to her husband: "Fanny must go and live with Mrs. Butt. That'll just make things straight. The rest of the children have all had better times than our Fanny, and if she gits with Mrs. Butt, it'll be better than the school work. It's Fanny's chance, I see."

‘It’ll be hard on you,’ said Mr. Eden.

“It must be done,” said Mrs. Eden.

When Mrs. Eden said so much, Mr. Eden saw it happen.

So Anne was a welcome guest at the Eden place and never came too early or stayed too long, and Mr. Eden was pleased to look after Star. This morning Anne lingered in the big busy kitchen.

It was a scene of the most attractive sort. There were children everywhere, in the best of health and spirits, tumbling over one another in the desire to have everything out of life. Mrs. Eden was making butter. Fanny was washing up and Bertha was wiping dishes. The window seats were filled with big mugs of flowers, brought in by the little ones. The two youngest children were cutting paper to bits, and strewing the floor with their efforts. The baby was the only quiet one, and he lay asleep in the cradle.

Anne looked at the piece of muslin, thrown over the cradle-head to keep away any daring flies. It was a well-watched baby.

"So Mr. Din brought you over, after the storm," said Mrs. Eden.

"He was tall and dark," said Anne, "and he was sad-looking."

She got up to go and Mrs. Eden said, "I'll come with you to the gate."

When they were outside, Mrs. Eden, blinking her eyes in the sunlight, continued: "Yes, that's Bill Din. He's the dark one—the other partner's red-haired. They're both good fellows."

"Something has happened to him, surely," said Anne.

"That's how life goes, Mrs. Butt," said Mrs. Eden. "Trouble comes to all. He's had trouble, I do know!"

"A fine straight boy," said Anne, "with a generous intention, and a good heart. He loved the wrong girl, of course."

"Sure," said Mrs. Eden. "She was a good girl, too; but she's at that age when she ain't able to see what things mean. She's married a real fine man, but the last I thought she'd have chosen. Only

these things don't come out like we'd think. She was a fine, beautiful girl, and she's done well, so there's good comes out eventually."

"Good?" said Anne. "What about Mr. Din? Any one could see that a man of his temperament was real, through and through, not one hair-breadth of flippancy in him. If any girl played with that thorough-bred nature, she deserved the worst that could happen."

"You're some hard on her, Mrs. Butt."

"I am. I hate the girl who undid that poor young fellow."

"You'll do more good being sorry for him, than being mad with her," said Mrs. Eden.

"O, it's no use being sorry for him," said Anne.

"Mind the road, Mrs. Butt," said Mrs. Eden. "Keep to the way the children go, and you'll be best."

The next morning Anne heard a knock at her door before ten o'clock, and opening it she saw a tall, lanky young man, riding the sorrel mare.

“Say, ma’am, are you Mrs. Butt?”

“Yes,” said Anne.

“My partner wants you to come over to our place and fix on a horse for riding.”

Toad dismounted, and continued: “The horses want using, and there’s few women have time to ride. Now if you’ll ride and let my partner go alongside, you’ll be doing a mighty good thing; for Bill Din has had horses on his brain too much. I fear a mental collapse. A lady to talk to might let him go from the business strain, and give him a new sweep of life. He don’t offer to go anywhere, but he’s liked you, as I feel in my bones, and he’ll never have the sauce to refuse you, if you ask him in preference to me.”

“So I am to ask him, and so compel him, have I?”

“It’s sure a good thing if you do, because you see as I said to you before, he’s got business on the brain. He’s running to seed with work, ma’am, and it’s sure killing him. Now what he wants is a lady who likes horses, to lead him from horses—see?”

"I see—very clearly. May I know the partner's name?"

"Toad Lorraine, and surely yours, ma'am. Very pleased to meet you, and count you providential. Called by my best friends 'T'—a big capital T—short and sweet."

"Am I to call you 'T'?"

"Sure, if you'll honour me. And say, ma'am, women are our helpmates, and come in on every occasion when most needed. I lost my head over a girl—happily my heart remained with me. All's well that ends well! But I hold a high ideal of all your feminine world. What are we without you?"

Anne laughed, at which Lorraine looked immensely surprised.

So that afternoon Bill Din, roaming about the prairie met Anne, riding on Star, and they conferred over horses.

It took an hour to decide on one for her, and then Bill promised to bring "Whitefoot" the next morning.

"I'm no companion," he said. "Ain't nothin' to say to any one."

"Then we'll suit each other," said Anne, "for I want to be quiet."

And so began some soothing and happy days. Anne and Bill rode and rode and rode, and they never talked, except to arrange "where" and "when"; and Anne was full of exhilaration, and Bill's haggard eyes lost some of their unmeaning strain. The horizon of the broad road is far better than the one made by an imprisoned mind.

One day when Bill and Anne were riding into Alamanca, Bill said, quite suddenly:

"I ain't been here—since—that dreadful time!"

"What time?" said Anne.

"Before that thunderstorm," said Bill.

He said it slowly as if he did not know what he meant, but immediately afterwards, having to dismount, and coming to Anne, to help her to do so, he said, "Forgive me. What's it to you when I'm mad or glad? Nothin'! Forgive me."

"It *is* something to me," said Anne.

Bill looked into her face, and then said slowly:

"Sympathy. God's best gift to His punished children."

And Anne went into a hardware store to buy something she did not want, while Bill walked up to the Town Hall, enjoying the vivid clearness of the day.

"She knows now—what I've been longing to tell her ever since!" he muttered.

And Bill bought her bananas and chocolate and raisins, and begged her to take some lunch, as they rode back.

"You oughter be hungry," said he. "I sure am."

CHAPTER XL

A BIRTHDAY WITH ANNE

RIDING through Alamanca one day with Bill Din, Mrs. Butt drew rein at a gate, where, within the yard, there was a sale in process.

"I should like to watch a while," said she.

So they remained near the gate, until a man wishing to come out, the riders moved slowly away.

"Who is he?" asked Anne.

"They call him Sheridan," said Din.

"He's an Englishman, isn't he?"

"I believe so."

Anne was silent for a while.

"He looks down-hearted," she said, after another pause.

"Do you see that tower in the far distance?"

inquired Bill. "Look well, and carefully, and tell me if you see it."

"Perfectly well," said Anne. "Why?"

"That is Barville Water Tower—You have good eyesight," said Bill Din. "Do keep using it, Mrs. Butt, I like to see you search the horizon."

Anne said nothing until they were riding back to the schoolhouse.

"Will you stay to supper, Mr. Din?"

"Sorry I can't to-night, but to-morrow's my birthday."

"Come to-morrow," said Anne.

"Thank you," said Bill.

He rode away, Anne watching him go.

Fanny Eden was delighted to hear that Mr. Din was coming to supper on his birthday. She talked about it all morning to Mrs. Butt.

"Ain't it good you've got him to stay to supper? He ain't stayed at any house for a long while—not to eat anythin'. He eats at home—by himself they say—Lorraine don't even know what he gits. He don't like company any more."

Mrs. Eden sent up a birthday cake with Fanny at about five o'clock. It had been a cause of great excitement to the Eden family for it was made in five layers, and had every appearance of melting in the mouth.

When Bill arrived, he was met by the little girl.
"Mrs. Butt's ridden up to Alamanca on some business. She'll be back any time. I'm to see you stay till she gits back."

Bill sat down.

"See the flowers in the vase?" she said.

"Sure," said Bill.

"For your birthday," said Fanny. "See the damask cloth with the red edge?"

"I certainly see it," said Bill.

"For your birthday," said Fanny. "Ain't you in clover?"

Bill nodded.

Fanny continued: "I like your tie, Mr. Din. Say when I grow up, I'll choose a man like you. I want to tell you somethin', will you let me?"

Bill Din looked at her. He got up from the sofa

where he had been sitting, and came to the window. Fanny Eden was standing, with folded arms, gazing at him.

"What is it?"

"'Bout Mrs. Butt?"

"Sure."

"Wal, she gits thoroughly done by everybody."

Bill was silent.

"Done out of dollars, done out of everythin'—she gives right along the line from morning to night. That Mrs. Pusey's gotten a smart new sewing-machine. She was here gassin' for an hour one day last week."

"Are you stopping here?" said Bill.

"On and off."

"Don't go off! Fanny, you're a dandy good girl."

"I know it, Mr. Din. I know you're some pleased with me, too, for lookin' after the widow and defenceless. She believes in everythin', Mr. Din, and blames nobody for nothin'. I believe there'd be no court-houses if Mrs. Butt was a

president. She's sorry for the drunkards and she excuses all. She's no earthly use with the cane—she keeps it locked up——”

Fanny stopped, Bill jerking her arm, as Mrs. Butt came into the house.

“Many happy returns of the day, Mr. Din.”

“You've been enjoying yourself in Alamanca,” he said.

It was getting dark; and Anne, remarking on the short twilight, lit the lamp, and put it on the table.

The lamp's beams were pale yet, and out of doors still glimmered through the window-panes.

“I don't like shutting out the trees,” she added.

“I've never had a birthday since I was a kid of nine,” said Bill. “Mother took me to Galma then. She went to see a cousin who had the gripple. I spent my time on the top of a wood-pile at the back of the house and I killed my first rattlesnake.”

“When I was a child,” said Anne, “we lived in the city. The birthday I remember best was the one in which my mother and father gave me a plant, a growing plant, that I could water, and see chang-

ing day by day. I never slept all night thinking about that poor little fern. I am afraid it was killed with kindness."

Fanny was just helping herself to a piece of cake. She looked at Bill.

"It don't do to be kind in this world," said Bill. "It's a hard world, and it needs meeting with hardness."

"It sure does," said Fanny; "if I hadn't been real mad with Selena Oyston when she took my cake out of the tin can, she'd be doing it to this day."

"I was too kind to that fern," said Anne, "for it did die, in spite of love and care. Still, you can't be too kind to people in trouble."

"It depends on the trouble, and how it came," said Bill.

"I don't think it does," said Anne. "They're needy and that's enough."

Fanny took another piece of cake.

Bill Din had hung his coat up behind the door and Anne, looking at it, said: "Your coat has been

torn in a machine, Mr. Din. Would it be too kind of me to darn it for you after supper? Let me see, what does it depend on? the trouble and how it came. If you'll tell me how you tore your coat we can see if I can be justified in doing it."

"You're not going to do it," said Bill. "See here, I'd sooner go all in rags, than let you bother your eyes over that coat of mine. There's plenty of folks to do it for me. Miss Ramsey comes up to the ranch every week and she'll do it. I tore it in Alamanca this morning, or I wouldn't have let you see it like that—you may be pretty sure it was done too late—I didn't want to miss a minute of the good time I'm having here."

"And I don't blame him," said Fanny. "Leave Miss Ramsey mend it, and let us folks play cards."

So the cards came out, and the evening was soon gone. When Bill got up to go, he took the coat on his arm.

"You're not using it," said Anne. "Leave it and I'll mend it."

Bill hesitated.

"Please do," said Anne. "It will be a pleasure to mend it."

"I'll leave it," said Bill. "Good-bye, Mrs. Butt, I'm in your debt."

And he went out quickly.

"How pleasant it has been to see Mr. Din happy!" said Mrs. Butt as she gathered the cards up, and put them in the case. "And now, Fanny, tell your mother I have got a piano. A bargain—I have got it from Mr. Sheridan."

"He's a no-good!" said Fanny.

Mrs. Butt was placing the cards on the bookshelf and she turned round quickly.

"Don't say it, Fanny. Never, in my house will I allow *any one* to call a fellow creature, no good!"

"I'm sorry, ma'am," said Fanny.

"I forgive you," said Anne, "because I know the motive prompting it was a good one. You want to take care of me, Fanny, you are such a little mother. Perhaps it may be the other way about. Never mind, we love each other."

Fanny flung her arms around Anne's neck and kissed her vehemently.

"Mr. Din," she whispered, "he's a good man."

"Good as gold," said Anne, "I'm sure he'll do everything in the very best way. What about him?"

"O, he'll be mad if you git Sheridan's piano," said Fanny.

Anne kissed the little girl.

"What a dreadful man you make of poor Mr. Din!" she said. "Now I think better of him than you do; I'm not frightened of him."

For answer Fanny clung to Anne and kissed her again and again.

And Anne laughed at her.

CHAPTER XLI

ANNE'S PIANO

THE days were drawing in, so that dark came about eight o'clock. Bill Din could just see Mrs. Butt moving about in the room, as he passed the window. She had not lit the lamp yet. He intended to tie up at the nearest fence post, but he changed his mind. He rode down to the Eden place, and put Gin-fly in the stables, returning slowly on foot.

He met Fanny coming under the locust trees.

He would not have spoken, but she stopped him.

"If you're agoin' to see Mrs. Butt, I may as well tell you she's gotten a piano. A good one. A good bargain. She ain't been done this time. Sheridan ain't done her, I'm glad to say. He wanted the money, I bet!"

"Going home?" inquired Bill.

His voice was cheerful, but Fanny did not feel happy.

"Sure," she said.

"Don't come back till I fetch my horse!" he said.

"Right, Mr. Din," said Fanny.

"My!" she said to herself, as she ran home. "I feel scared for Mrs. Butt. He's a'goin' to say somethin', I believe."

Din went slowly onwards, under the locust trees, which were keeping the moon from getting a clear light on the road. Patches of shadow and light made the ground look as though it were a decorative design.

Bill came out from the shadows into the clear space of the yard in front of Mrs. Butt's cottage, and a light was shining now.

He rapped on the door.

A flood of light blinded his eyes for a moment, and then he saw Anne, smiling at him.

"O, it is you," said she, opening the door wide.

Bill came in without saying a word, and began to take off his coat, oblivious of any recommendation to do it.

He hung it up behind the door and sat down on the sofa.

Anne watched him in amazement.

"You're very graphic to-night, Mr. Din," she said.

"Excuse me," said Bill. "I forgot. Good-evening. May I stay a while?"

"Of course you may. Have you had supper?"

"Thank you—yes—sure! Say, you ain't agoin' to play that musical instrument, are you?"

"I was going to show you it."

"Don't!" said Bill Din.

Anne's eyes opened wider, as she looked back at the pony boy.

She closed the lid of the piano and came back to the table.

"Mr. Din," she said, "what has gone wrong?"

"In the future tell me when you want pianos!" said Bill Din.

Anne began to laugh.

"I'll tell you when I want a tea-cup—or a piece of string, or a new hat. I see. I've to tell you when I make an acquaintance."

"No—you are turning it off with nonsense. I am not laughing. Look at me."

"Yes, I am looking," said Anne. "You are frowning out of all good looks. I wonder you dare to ask me to do it, with such an uninviting expression."

"Mrs. Butt," said Bill, "do you believe in me?"

"No one could help it, Mr. Din."

"That's good—that's the best thing you've said to-night."

Din was smiling now, and he got up from the sofa and walked to the table, where he could face Mrs. Butt.

"Supposin' you had to give up a friend made in this neighbourhood, would you give up me?"

"Certainly not."

"You may have to."

"You mean—" Anne paused.

"You may have to," repeated Bill.

"If I buy a piano without your leave?"

"You may have to give up an acquaintance because it ain't a wise one," persisted Bill. "I know you'll do it. I know you'll be wise, Mrs. Butt. Just as wise as you are good and kind!"

"Now I'm expecting something I don't like," said Anne. "Advice."

"Sure. You mustn't say you don't like it—that ain't wise. The world's full of difficulties and we've got to look after one another. If I ain't able to protect a friend like you've been, I'd jist as soon shoot myself dead for a nin-can-poop."

"And I thank you for your kindness. Ten thousand times. Go on with the advice, I'll listen."

"I want you to cut that fellow Sheridan."

"Why?"

"He ain't fit for your company."

"I suppose he's drinking—or taking opium. I think it is a drug from what I saw of him yesterday. And that is why I am to cut him?"

"Ain't that enough, without more?"

"It is enough to make me feel very sad," said Anne. "This poor countryman of mine is nearly an outcast. I am to add to his burden by making it still more evident to him. No, I cannot do it!"

"You may have to," said Bill. "Which is worth most—a friend or an acquaintance? See what economy you have. You'll give up a friend you own you value, for the sake of an acquaintance you have nothing in common with. The recommendation of friendship to you—is—what is it, Mrs. Butt?"

"I never explain those things, Mr. Din."

"I'll tell you. The misery they're in. Misery. What produces misery? Tell me, Mrs. Butt, what produces misery."

"I must act as I feel best. I've told you, Mr. Din. I cannot cut that poor man. No, not even for you."

Bill was preparing for a fierce outburst, but these last words produced an effect on him, and his voice trembled when he spoke again.

"Mrs. Butt, I—I'm done out! Good-night!"

He got up to go.

Anne put out her hands to stop him.

He turned round again.

"Mr. Din. Please understand."

"But I'm done out," said Bill. "That's truth."

"You're not, you know it."

"Quit this friendship then!"

Anne shook her head.

"It would be wicked," she said, "to be overruled by you."

And Bill Din took his coat and hat, and walked off without another word.

Anne put out the lamp and went into her room.

Fanny Eden came running back to the cottage, but as the lights were all out, she went home again.

And the moon set, clouds came up, and the darkness was complete. Anne could not even see the catalpa, whose leaves were tapping on her bedroom window-pane.

CHAPTER XLII

ANNE BEFRIENDS TROUBLE

WHEN Ambrose Eden arrived at the ranch the following morning, he carried a letter in his hand.

Bill was at the water-trough with Gin-fly, but he saw that the boy held something like an envelope, so he called out: "Eden!"

"Sir?" said Ambrose, running up to him.

"What have you got there?"

"A letter for you, sir."

Bill took it from him.

"You can go to Alamanca this morning about that netting. Be quick. We'll want you this afternoon in the hayfield."

"Sure," said the boy. "I'll be there. That there letter come from Mrs. Butt, sir. She give it me as I come out of the yard."

Din was opening it, so Ambrose got no answer. It was read in haste, but afterwards more slowly.

DEAR MR. DIN,

Don't let us do anything in haste. I am willing to listen to advice from a true friend, and will, if convinced, own I am in the wrong. Will you try to convince me? I don't think you have done so yet.

Yours sincerely,

ANNE BUTT.

Bill's face, which had been set in determinate lines, relaxed into a more human expression, and for the rest of the day he was in capital good humour with Lorraine and Ambrose.

"My!" said the little boy as he ran home in the evening; "if the school-marm would give me the chance to take letters every day, we'd have a bummung good time at the ranch."

He called at No. 10 before he went home.

"Marm, I give the note. Anyhow, I think he'll be writin' maybe. But I'll be through the yard in the mornin', and I'll be callin' every mornin' to see if I can help you fill the wood-box."

Anne gave him a piece of pie, and he walked

slowly under the locust trees, eating it, and pondering over the wonderful resources of life.

Bill came over to No. 10 when the hayfield was cleared, leaving Lorraine cutting grass with the machine. It was one of those evenings when the moon grows light almost before night is established. The wild roses were showing pink everywhere, and the barley was changing from green to a duller colour. The heavy-winged moths buzzed in Din's face, and from the ground came a chorus of strident voices—life doing its best to give thanks for warmth and sunlight.

Mrs. Butt had a visitor, which was the first drawback—a boy of sixteen, Rufus Proctor, who had called for a book on Natural History; but at last the youth slowly decided to go, and Bill was left with Anne.

They had been sitting in the dark, and now she lit the lamp and looked at him.

"I hear you got my letter, Mr. Din," she said to him, sitting down at the table, "and I see you are willing to have patience with my humour.

What is life for, if it is not for growing up into something bigger, like all the trees and flowers? We can't do it without taking lessons. Now what have you to teach me?"

Words did not come to Bill at that moment. He kept looking at Anne, and feeling at a loss. He managed to say: "In a while I can tell you. Say, I've enjoyed myself to-day. That was a mighty kind letter!"

"I'm glad," said Anne. "I meant it, too."

Bill looked at her. He had no idea of what he was to say next, but time was going, and the opportunity must not be missed, so he plunged into the subject again.

"What I said to you last night was for your good, Mrs. Butt."

"No one understands that better than me, Mr. Din. I mean no one could rely more on your good intentions."

"That helps some. I can try to tell you what I mean. Mrs. Butt, give me time and a chance. There's a wonderful cave 'bout ten

miles from here. Will you go riding with me on Sunday?"

"I should like to go," said Anne.

"Right. I'll fix it up. If the weather changes—" Bill paused, and a thoughtful look came over his face—"We'll plan something instead. Can I come up to-morrow night?"

"Any time you like, Mr. Din."

Bill Din put both hands on the edge of the table at which he was sitting, and leaned forward, so that he could see Mrs. Butt's eyes.

"Is there any one besides me who can come here any time?" he said.

"Everybody," said Anne.

Bill pushed his chair back, so that it made a shrill jar throughout the room. His hands closed. He turned his eyes on the window.

"I'm not like a castle with a moat around," said Anne. "We've outlived those gloomy days. There are all sorts of doors into my house, but everybody's welcome who wants to come. Some bring me more happiness than others, of course!"

Bill's head took a slight turn towards Mrs. Butt, so she continued: "Much more happiness, of course."

And Bill looked at her again.

"Mrs. Butt," he said, "I don't know your age, but you ain't much younger than me, I bet. Life has made me twenty years older though. Direction is what you want!"

"Is it?" said Anne.

"Sure—every time! That's all you want. Will you let me tell you when you want direction?"

"Yes—tell me now."

"Sheridan's best out, then."

"I can't think so," said Anne.

Bill and Anne stood looking at one another, and a knock came at the door.

It was a troubled knock to Anne's ears, and she grew paler as she noted it. Bill Din was so busy thinking what she had just said to him, that he had not even heard it.

Anne went to the door and saw Spen.

"Mrs. Butt," he said, "will you let me come in

and talk to you? There's been a fight, and Sheridan's hit—I feel I'll go mad. Is any one in?"

"There's Mr. Din."

"Get him away, will you, Mrs. Butt, because we want you in Alamanca."

"Wait," said Anne.

Spen paused, waiting, and looking at her. She stood in the doorway, her eyes widely opened. She went back into the house. Bill was standing near the door now.

"Mr. Din," she said.

There was no answer from Bill.

"There's a man in trouble—trouble can't wait. Can you come again?"

Bill Din shook his head.

Anne clasped her hands together.

Bill glanced at the door, and then he came to her and whispered in her ear: "Anne, Anne! Trouble! I'm in trouble!"

Anne looked at him, and as swiftly looked away.

"You must go, Mr. Din," she said coldly. "I wish you to go."

"Anne," he whispered.

"Go!" said Anne.

Bill Din stood for a minute, thinking. Then, without looking at Mrs. Butt, he came out into the porch.

The man was nowhere in sight.

Bill walked away.

CHAPTER XLIII

“THE MISMANAGEMENT OF MAN”

HALF an hour later, Spen had driven Mrs. Butt into Alamanca Creek.

Main Street was not deserted, and there was a crowd on the porch of the “Green-bank,” but Spen took Anne straight to Sheridan’s rooms.

“I ain’t a lover of Sheridan,” he said, “but the poor fellow’s been tampered with beyond all sense. There’s a man in this town called Johnnie Holmes. He borrowed a hundred dollars from the Englishman, and there was somethin’ said about gittin’ it put down in black and white. Anyway, it ain’t been done. Wal, it seems that Holmes let him have ten dollars last week, and now he’s been comin’ on Sheridan for the dough—Sheridan got mad, and brought up the fac’ of the borrowed hundred, but Holmes denied it—swore he wouldn’t

pay a cent of it, swore he'd paid last month! Now, he ain't never done such a thing—that was a manufactured story in a factory Holmes keeps full of such goods, ready to dispose of to his own advantage. Wal, the result of that lie was a scrimmage. Sheridan got up a knife and was striking at Holmes, but Holmes had gotten the advantage and he threw up Sheridan's arm. Sheridan got cut. He says Holmes don' it. Holmes says Sheridan don' it. There was a scrap, anyhow. Folks came in and Holmes was dragged out. Sheridan's gone mad. He's raving like a lunatic. They're a'talkin' of an asylum. I was in the room, lookin' at the poor figure of what was once a man, and I thought of you."

So saying Spen opened the door of Sheridan's rooms, and entered, followed by Mrs. Butt.

There were two people there, the remnant of a dispersed crowd. Sheridan was sitting in a Morris chair, while a woman bound up his arm. His coat was on the floor, where there lay a broken chair and a smashed glass.

A policeman stood in the window watching the two of them. Sheridan's eyes were blood-shot and his face was like parchment. The woman's hands were occupied with her work, and her eyes were fixed on the bandage.

"I've brought a friend," said Spen.

Sheridan raised his eyes but he said nothing. The woman got up from her work and went to Mrs. Butt.

"You can't be too careful, ma'am. Holmes is bein' watched, but if the two of them got together again they would mean murder. I'll go now, if you don't mind, for I've left my children in bed."

Anne took off her gloves and came further into the room.

Sheridan spoke. "Good evening, Mrs. Butt. Sorry this is no night for making you feel happy. Who is that devil standing in the window?"

The policeman came away and went outside the door.

"Those sort of people don't like to be named,"

said Sheridan. "I named him and he fled. Somebody give Mrs. Butt a chair. She's come to see the play. I don't mind her in the least. She's my friend."

"Mad as a Hottentot," said Spen in a whisper to Mrs. Butt.

"That's Spen whispering," said Sheridan. "I've known him for a long time, and he's always running about. He makes me tired to death. Death? Death? I ought to have met my death a long while ago. I was once young—once green—once callow. That was the time when I was crammed with knowledge. Mrs. Butt you look as if you were tired. Don't let Spen trouble you. I say, would some one mind calling my mother?"

"I'll do it," said Anne, coming and sitting down beside him.

"Ah, you'll call a long time. She's gone, Mrs. Butt. Happily gone! You've got a mother's face, though! You made me think of her as you looked at me. You take me there. I think I shall sleep. Good-night!"

Anne, leaving him sleeping, came out to Spen
who was standing on the porch.

"What a life!" said the young man.

"What a world!" said Anne.

"It ain't the world, but the man," said Spen.

"The mismanagement of man!" said Anne.

CHAPTER XLIV

ANNE LIKES HER LETTER

A MBROSE EDEN called at No. 10 about six o'clock next morning.

Mrs. Butt was rather absent-minded, and did not even thank him for getting the wood into the wood-box. Seeing nothing was coming for his care, Ambrose made a bee-line for the ranch.

Bill Din was mowing. Ambrose saw him wave, so he walked right up to the fence near which his master would presently appear with his machine. It was pleasant standing motionless on a fine day, looking at the butterflies alighting on the morning-glories. Ambrose felt the sun on the tips of his ears, and glowed with joy to idle the minute in peace. Presently the horses appeared, then Bill, in the act of pulling up.

"I ain't gotten a letter," said Ambrose, "but I seen you wave."

"Here," said Bill. "Take this letter to Mrs. Butt, and wait for an answer. Mind you don't come off without the answer."

"Sure," said Ambrose, his spirits rising still higher. He found letter carrying the most attractive occupation of his experience, for it held honey and pie and jam, and other delights, all along the way—not to speak of power, knowledge, and human interest to entertain the mind.

He raced off, but before he got out of sight Lorraine called him: "I want you," he said.

"Can't come," said Ambrose. "I'm busy!"

And he was away through the fence, and down the hill at a great rate.

"It'll be my turn next," said Toad. "Bill must make things real smooth for me, when my turn comes, or I'll sure let him remember this!"

Ambrose's feet, bare to the sun, were soon through the fields, and out on the road. Keep-

ing in the grass, he was at the schoolhouse directly.

Mrs. Butt was bringing Whitefoot into the yard, petting the horse, and rubbing its nose.

Ambrose did not speak. He put the letter into her hand, turned away, and walked under the locust trees.

Mrs. Butt looked surprised to get it.

Fanny was watching from the doorway.

She came up: "I'll take care of Whitefoot, Mrs. Butt," she said.

Anne went into the house with the letter, opened it, and waited a moment.

By and by she began to read, and her colour rose more and more, until a vivid blush was on her cheek, but her expression which had been one of apprehension and doubt, melted into a look of happiness.

She read as follows:

DEAR MRS. BUTT,

Forgive me for my temper last night. It is one of my troubles. I sure wish I could give it into your

care, it is more than I can manage, single handed. Can I come up to-night? I've gotten troubles of every kind, and with your directions something might be done. Trouble can't wait.

Faithfully yours,
BILL DIN.

Anne looked for pen and ink and wrote a reply in two minutes.

DEAR MR. DIN,

What is there to forgive? I shall look for you to-night.

Yours sincerely,

ANNE BUTT.

Ambrose was in the corn-patch, and was called for by his sister.

He came back eagerly.

Mrs. Butt handed him a large piece of lemon pie, and gave him the letter.

He ran off in an outburst of gleeful spirits.

CHAPTER XLV

ANNE'S DREAM

WHEN Bill Din came into Anne's living-room, he was prepared to find someone besides herself.

There was no one but herself.

Anne was sitting by the window. It was wide open. The catalpa leaves were rustling in a pleasant south wind and the stars were just beginning to show themselves.

There was a chair beside Anne.

It was vacant.

Bill took it.

"Should we light up?" she asked him.

"Are we in the dark?" asked Bill.

Silence followed until Anne broke it by saying:
"I've stopped off all visitors to-night."

"For my trouble?" asked Bill.

"For you," said Anne.

"Does the man come off best who has the most trouble? I am surely prepared to say that I am that man!" said Bill.

"I am sorry about your trouble. I'd help you if I could do it, but I'm afraid I can't."

"You have helped me."

"Unconsciously, perhaps. You see——"

"See what?"

"I can't give you what would make you happy—I would if I could. I don't know any one I'd sooner give happiness to—but I'm not a goddess or a fairy, who can dispense favours to the deserving. I often think that the—the most stalwart people come off with loss—because—perhaps—why, Mr. Din, you're never telling me your trouble, and time is going!"

"Your voice and your words help me," said Bill. "Go on talking."

"I hope that the best will not pass you by. Perhaps it appears to have done so. Look ahead, Mr. Din. There may be something better coming to you."

Bill was silent.

Anne burst out suddenly: "O, how cruel of me to say so to a disappointed man—I know nothing can make up to you!"

"You could do it," said Bill.

"Me?" she asked.

"I love you, Anne. It is you I love."

"No!" said Anne.

Bill stared at her.

"I've told you day by day," he said.

"I cannot bear to hear you say it—you are spoiling yourself, Mr. Din!"

Bill's face changed. "How? Spoil? Go on, and tell me why when I ask you to be my wife, you should say what you do!"

"Ah," said Anne. "I am sorry I ever asked you to my house, or ever looked at you."

"But you did look at me, you did comfort me, you did love me, Anne! Though you tell me all day and night that you didn't love me, I ain't a'goin' to believe it."

"But it was sympathy," said Anne.

"Sympathy!" said Bill. "God save me from sympathy, then!"

"I could never have dreamed it was you speaking," said Anne.

"Dream? What did you dream?" said Bill. He could scarcely see her face.

When she spoke next, her voice was cold.

"I dreamt of constancy," she said.

"To what? To a mask? To a shadow?"

There was no answer.

"There ain't any word for it. I say there ain't anythin' in it. Nothin' to be true to, in a mask!"

"Is that how you talk of the woman you loved?" said Anne.

Bill Din put his hands on the arms of Mrs. Butt's chair, and looking into her face, he said: "You are an understanding, kind woman, but you ain't able to understand me. Surely the woman that saw in the beginning, could see in the end. Here's life—you alone, me alone—both have suffered—I look to you for comfort—I look—I look—I drink of comfort—I hope I give you some

back. Then this which comes of it is more than the other feeling—bigger—better—truer! And then—here comes the thought to freeze your blood in your veins—the woman loves a dream better than the man.”

“You put it cruelly, Mr. Din—and say everything vehemently. But you should have been true to yourself—and not come away from—yourself!”

“Was that bein’ true to myself, to hold to some-
thin’ that’s gone? I’ll surely make no words about
good-bye. I’ve spoilt your dreams—maybe that’s
the best thing I done yet. I don’t ask you to
build them up again. When next you sympathize
with a poor man, take him as he is, Anne—and
comfort him altogether!”

Bill Din went out of the house, shutting the outer door sharply.

Anne sat for a while in the darkness. Then she lit a lamp, and got out some books. She wandered idly through their pages.

CHAPTER XLVI

GIN-FLY AND WHITEFOOT

BILL looked about him; he was riding alone, nowadays.

Gin-fly was still climbing slowly, feeling the meditative mood of the man.

"It don't matter what it is,—the fac' that counts is the fac' that I'm to begin over."

Gin-fly began to trot, and from that, put out more swiftly still, until man and horse were going along at a great pace.

A long way in front of him, the railway crossed the road, and Bill Din could see someone riding ahead of him, towards the rails.

"Anne," he muttered.

He thought to himself: "If a train should come along about now, come real slow, I should ride up to her."

Anne was going slowly and had forgotten the railway.

Being pre-occupied, she rode steadily forward, without slackening speed as she drew near, until Whitefoot was almost on the cars. It was an express.

Bill saw Anne pull up suddenly and the horse reared. She kept the mare well in hand until the train had gone dashing by, then unaccountably losing her nerve, she let Whitefoot feel her fears.

The horse plunged, and set off like a mad thing.

Bill came riding after her, but Whitefoot had got a good start, and a curve in the road put them out of his sight.

Gin-fly always at one with her master, did her best, and soon they were in sight of the runaway mare again.

And now Bill leaned forward in the saddle, his coaxing voice acting as a spur to Gin-fly's tender ear—the good horse flew under a caress of love, feeling delight in the faith that was guiding her.

And so they came nearer and nearer to Whitefoot.

Things were reeling to Anne. The air was rushing like a hurricane in her ears. Whitefoot, hearing another horse behind her, swerved violently, and flung the rider from the saddle, bolting again with straining ears and bleating sides. Gin-fly was as ready for the emergency as her master's arm. She leapt the intervening distance. Anne was caught violently by Bill Din, and Gin-fly was pulled up with a thud.

Bill had dismounted.

Anne's lips were blue, and her eyes glazed. He wondered if there was water to be got anywhere.

He made her sit down on the bank and fanned her.

She looked at him once or twice unknowingly, and her teeth began to chatter—Bill rubbed her hands, until some colour came into the greyness of her face.

She sighed and shut her eyes, but when she opened them again, she saw Bill Din.

"You ain't fit to ride alone," said Bill.

Gin-fly neighed.

Anne sighed again, and put her hands to her hair to see if all was straight.

"Where is my hat?" she said.

"Back yonder," said Bill. "How did you come to lose your nerve, seein' you'd let the express git by? You held on through the worst—and you give in at the victory point. 'Twas sure a pity!"

"That's my hat-pin—in the dust. I don't want it, if my hat's gone," said Anne.

"I ain't gotten any water to sprinkle on you," said Bill. "You'll ride on Gin-fly. Would you mind if I took you up in front of me? We'd git along with more speed."

"Just exactly what you think best," said Anne.

Bill thought she was in a beautiful mood.

And so they rode away together.

Bill took her to the nearest farm, where a kind Dutch woman came out to meet them, spreading out generous arms, saying: "But vot you haf' had an accident! Kom' in!"

She took every care of Anne, and gave refreshment to both the travellers. When it came time to go, she lent Anne a hat.

It was a large black-brimmed straw, with a pink feather in it.

The Dutchman offered to lend another horse.

Bill Din said there was no need for it.

The Dutchman said nothing.

When Anne came into the clear, evening air, and saw the stars in the firmament sparkling vividly or, glowing like flame, in the blue depths of night, she grew buoyant.

"Glorious!" she said.

Bill Din heard it, as he talked to the Dutchman.

And when the journey home had begun, and they had ridden out of the yard, they stopped talking.

They rode under trees, and out into open spaces, and down again into damp hollows, under those frosty stars, drinking in that heavenly air.

It was sad to get to the journey's end.

Bill reluctantly helped her to dismount at No. 10.

"O," said Anne. "I have been happy to-night."

"What?" cried Bill eagerly, leaning forward for more.

"You comfort me," she said.

Whitefoot had run straight home, so Bill Din went down to the farm to reassure the Eden family.

He rode home across the prairie, full of plans for next Sunday.

CHAPTER XLVII

“SEE WHAT I DONE!”

A NNE was expecting to see Bill any minute. She put a letter on the window sill, when she heard him ride into the yard, but when the door burst open and he came in she knew by his face that he was very upset.

“Anne,” he said.

“What has happened?” she cried.

“I’ve ruined the lives of two of my friends.”

“What do you mean, Bill? Come in and tell me!”

“It is the hunter from Ari-wa-kis, who went away this spring, with Silvia Lake—you know they married suddenly?”

“Yes, yes,” said Anne. “I know all about her.”

“Louis Buttress is lost and Silvia is at Ari-wa-kis—separated from him—through me!”

"How could that be?"

"I've known Silvia since she was a kid of five—and I knew she loved Louis Buttress. I pushed the matter, and at my heart I knew it was all Buttress she cared for! But she promised me, Anne."

"Ah, yes!"

"And when she was in Chicago, Buttress went to see her and he married her. I knew he had won her heart—I knew it—but she daren't tell him and she daren't tell me that she'd made a mistake—and she married without telling either of us!"

"I see."

"And I—I ain't used to curbing myself—never in this world have I done it. I've gone mad instead and got my way. It was my way I wanted—my partner told me off all right—but I scorned him—I sure scorned all the good that come near me. I scorned everythin', from the God that created me to the worm at my feet—I seen I could punish her——"

"*You* wanted to punish her——"

"Give me up, Anne! See what I am!"

"Bill!"

"I wanted her to feel pain, and I knew how—I knew how better'n Buttress did! Buttress loved her, but it ain't the same thing as knowin' a character! I seen the way. It would be through fear and through Buttress. I went after them into the woods, and done it all—done it all perfect as a puzzle when you know how it works! I can see Silvia's face desperate—I was proud of it! Then I went on to Buttress, and I raked him up with it, knowin' that he was on new ground, and wouldn't act like a man who understood girls—and then I left 'em—left 'em—in the precipice down which I'd flung 'em! Next thing I heard she was at Ari-wa-kis—by herself!"

Bill put out his hands to Mrs. Butt.

"Anne, Anne, what can I do."

"Tell me what you've heard about Buttress!"

"Read this paragraph," said Bill.

His fingers were trembling so with excitement that he could not pull the newspaper from his

pocket. Anne did it for him, and as she read, Bill's fingers went in and out of this same pocket, finding oats which he scattered nervously on the floor.

Anne read:

A tragedy in the making of Hal Robbs's huge book upon the Indian, has come out of an apparently simple event. Robbs's two experts, Louis Buttress, a trapper from the Northern Interior of the States, and John D. Scale, New York, were engaged in communicating with some Indians encamped on the brink of a river. Beyond the fact that the two men failed to put in an appearance at the camp—and that there is now no clue of them—nothing can be made of the mystery. Robbs has spared no pains to unravel the fate of two of his eleven men—foul play is suspected. To such hazards do men charge their lives in the procuring of history for the future good of the race.

Anne threw the paper on the floor.

"News for filling, that's all! If you'll go to Buttress, I'll go to Silvia!"

"You speak as if you saw him! For God's sake, Anne, tell me if you hope?"

"I do—I see great hope——"

"Buttress's like will never be seen again on Ari-

wa-kis shores. And she was his joy—I've killed their joy!"

"Bill, act! You can go to the Indians!"

"Sure, I can go to the Indians," he said.

He stood staring out of the window, from whence came the sounds of a horse's impatient hoofs.

"See what I done!" he said again, suddenly.

"See what I am!"

"I'm afraid Silvia will have seen the paper—I'll ride over at once," said Anne.

"You will?" said Bill. "Then I'll go north. Dead or alive I'll find Louis Buttress! I'll bring him home."

Bill Din went out, and mounting Gin-fly he rode away. Anne looked out on to the calm Sunday morning. Everything was wrapped in sunshine.

And it was with a shiver of dread, that she went up to the Eden place for Star.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE INDIAN AND THE PONY BOY

DIN was on the brink of a wide river and the woods were westward. The Indian, encamped in a perfect spot, under some bog willow trees, was sitting watching the water, in pensive silence.

The squaw, some yards away, was making baskets with skilful fingers.

Din came up with caution, but sat down by the man and said: "White man still here? Buttress?"

The Indian gave him a look and said: "Buttress big man—him straight."

"Sure," said Din thoughtfully. "Good hunter, too."

The Indian, who was as grave as the woods and rivers where he was living, suddenly broke into a smile, and his squaw's face illumined with the same

shining gladness as she caught her lord's pleasure.

"Him great hunter," said the Indian. "Great hunter Louis—Indian loves him."

Din nodded: "Great hunter all alone," he said, and then the squaw looked up sharply.

The Indian gazed at his wife as he said:

"Hunter shoot big game. No one touch him—no one track him—so!"

The squaw's stealthy looks increased. Everything she could spare from the basket went to the study of Din.

The Indian, whose feet were bare, began to look in a box for a pair of shoes, which he proceeded to put carefully on his feet.

"Indian go now—say farewell to white man."

The squaw, who was watching her husband's face, began to put away her work. She had stopped looking at Din.

The pony boy knew that confidence was going, and searched about in his mind for something to restore it.

Din rolled over on his side, and gazing deeply

into the Indian's eyes, he said slowly: "Indian fear nothing! Hunter—safe."

The Indian stretched out his hand, saying: "Blue-grass friends with White Man. Him trusts. Him see White Man's heart pretty good."

And the squaw smiled and began her work again and before Din could let the words out, the Indian had said: "Blue-grass take White Man in the morning, while ground still wet. Show him hunter—not good day—all dark trail. Blue-grass no use—life no good."

And then Blue-grass grew quiet, as though thinking, and Din, watching the swift moving river, felt a kind warmth stealing over him; and it was not the sun, for it had already set in a bank of stormy clouds.

And the moon came up over the river, and flooded the willows with light, where they were drenched with the passing water. And the clouds fled before the wind and laid bare the heavens.

And Bill Din dreamed of a possibility of happiness, and his eyes never closed throughout the night.

CHAPTER XLIX

A LOVELY EVENT

ANNE had only once been to Ari-wa-kis, for she had had great difficulty in persuading Star to pass the gate that led to the large frame house. This difficulty had kept her in other directions.

This Sunday morning her pony had gone as though aware that it was on a journey home, and the gate being open, she rode into the yard.

Star trod on catnip and Michaelmas daisies, now rioting vigorously on all sides, showing the lack of life for some months; but she could see smoke issuing from the chimney, so she tied the pony to the fence and came under the big maple tree sheltering the porch.

She knocked.

There was no answer.

While she waited Anne caught sight of the

gleaming water, and beyond it, on the south bank, the old cabin, where the hunter had lived only a short while ago.

Still there was no answer.

Anne rapped louder, and heard footsteps. She looked eagerly for the figure of a woman, and saw, at last, a pale thin girl, who stood looking at her in an unseeing way.

“Mrs. Buttress?” said Anne.

“Please go away—I can’t see any one.”

“May I rest? I don’t feel equal to riding back again just now.”

“Yes,” said Silvia.

She was still looking at Mrs. Butt as though she saw beyond her.

“Take a seat anywhere you like,” she added.

Anne sat down on the nearest chair, and looked nervously at the girl. She was standing in the doorway, staring at the maple tree with abstracted eyes.

“Mrs. Buttress,” said Anne. “Could I have a drink of water?”

Silvia went out of the room and came back with a glass, which she filled with a dipper from a pail of fresh water.

"Star loves this place," said Anne.

"Star?" said Silvia. "Did you come on Star? I don't like that pony very good."

"Poor little pony," said Anne, "she loves you. I expect she's turning her head to look for you to come to her. Take her an apple."

Silvia picked one from the table and went out to Star, Anne following her.

"She's a pretty thing," said the girl.

"So she is!" said Anne. "And you rode her once I hear."

"Me! Why, who are you? The schoolma'am?"

"Yes."

"O, ma'am, we were once happy, the pony and me. I wish you'd go away. I've been here alone for two weeks and I had a dream last night that's driven me crazy. I'm sure not fit for company."

"My poor child," said Anne. "I wonder you haven't gone mad."

"Do you believe in dreams? But I ain't a'goin' to ask you! Yes, Star knows me good enough. Do you like the view from here?"

"The most beautiful view anywhere about here. Will you take me to the lake-side?"

"I was just a'goin' when you came into the yard. I felt like creepin' about in the brush, same as I did when a kid. That's my husband's house, across the lake, close by the water."

Silvia sighed, two terrible sighs, that went to Anne's heart.

She took the girl's hand and held it firmly; and Silvia, after looking earnestly into Mrs. Butt's face, left passive fingers in the warm grasp. And so they journeyed down the slope towards the water.

Suddenly Anne felt a jerk, as Silvia's fingers freed themselves, and a woman came out from some blackberry bushes with a half-filled pail.

It was Catherine Talbot.

"Is it true about your husband, Silvia Buttress?" she called out.

"What is the news, Catherine?"

"He's missing, they say. Been lost."

Anne saw the girl straighten herself.

"Where did you get the news?" she called out.

"In to-day's papers. They're all a'talkin' about it in Alamanca."

Silvia ran into the brush and down the slope followed more slowly by Mrs. Butt. Catherine continued her journey with her pail of berries.

"Now she knows," said Anne to herself.

Reaching the pebbly shore of the lake, Silvia threw stone after stone into the water. She sent them skimming along with such a skill that Anne could see the child of a few years back, playing games on long summer evenings. Silvia turned to greet her with the words—"My dream!"

"Yes," said Anne soothingly. "You must go to find him."

"I said if it was a life or death matter, I'd come. I must have known, in a way. Ma'am 'twas my

fault I'm here! But I'll go when I'm collected.
I——”

“Bill Din has gone already.”

“Bill!”

The rage and contempt in these words frightened Anne.

“He's sorrier than he can say—he's gone already. We'll go when you like,” Mrs. Butt added quickly.

“Then tell me, have you seen the paper?”

“Your husband and another man, who were working for Hal Robbs have disappeared, and there is no clue to their whereabouts.”

“We'll go,” said Silvia. “Are you comin' with me?”

“Certainly,” said Anne.

Silvia looked at Ari-wa-kis once more.

Anne, standing amongst hickory, cherry, and wild apple trees, waited for her new friend. She could see that the girl was thinking intently.

There was a faint breath of wind, it ruffled the surface of the water; but under the shelter of the

brush on the south shore the lake was becalmed into a blue-green shadow.

Silvia's eyes had gone to the north shore.

She turned round to look for Anne, and held out her hand to her.

"Ma'am," she said, "you're the kindest woman I ever met. I'll tell you somethin'. Have you ever heard of the hunter who lived in the cabin on the north shore? When I was pretty sick with the world, getting hardened with findin' my way into life, a lovely event happened to me which lifted me out of the dark."

"Through him?" asked Anne. "Through the hunter?"

"Through him," said Silvia.

The silence slowly filtered the spirits of the two women, until it was possible to begin again.

"I was a-bathin' down there—Ari-wa-kis—south shore—a place where none ever came before. Buttress was a mad hunter, he went where none ever went before. I never knew he was there, and as I was a'comin' splashin' out, I heard some-

thin', and it was a step, and I felt the shame stingin' me like death, as it came to me, wonderin' who he could be. And I looked—and there was Buttress. And would you believe it, as sure as life, there came over me, as I looked at him, a beautiful warm shining little dress, which fitted me like an angel had done it, and comforted me, so as I felt clothed! And it was real, more real and true than dresses made up to Alamanca, with waistbands and hooks and eyes! And Buttress made the dress and gave me it, and all in a moment he did it, 'cos he was made that way. And after that, he forgot he did it, 'cos it come so natural."

The sound of a cowbell tinkled from the low pastures and the reeds rustled in the breeze. Silvia walked away along the pebbly shore. Anne could see her white dress fluttering in the movement of wind and the little gay comb she wore in her hair, now ablaze with the sunbeams. So she flitted into distance, like a firefly.

There, standing in the soft shadows, Anne thought of all the suitors, one by one, in turn—

Bank notes and dollars mouldered into darkness; mansions became crumbling dust; scholarship ended in dry bones; but the golden spirit of life itself, the creator of Love, won, out of nothing but spirit.

CHAPTER L

THE HUNTER'S DEFENDERS

JOHN D. SCALE halted on the path.

He had been making his way swiftly through the brush, and was about to slip amongst the alders and willows near the river, when he heard an unaccustomed sound.

He saw an Indian, only a foot away from him.

Scale became nervous.

"Where—hunter?" cried Blue-grass.

Scale's hair rose on end; he bit his lips. He dropped a piece of wood.

"Fear not," said the Indian. "See?"

Blue-grass threw his knife down, and stretched out his hand.

Scale took it with agony.

"Hunter bad sick—Blue-grass see him!"

Scale nodded.

He slipped amongst the alders and willows, closely followed, almost to the heel, by the Indian. A quarter of an hour's walk brought them to a rocky portion of the river. Here, formed out of limestone, were several tortuous caves. The Indian smiled as he watched Scale cautiously advance.

"Blue-grass knows all roads—pretty good. Him keep still!"

Scale dare not answer. He entered the cave, followed by the Indian.

Buttress lay on a bed of leaves and corn-stalks.

It was covered also with an old coat, once worn by John D. Scale.

"Hunter fall—bad sick!" said Blue-grass.

He stood in solemn silence, surveying the emaciated form of the unconscious man.

Scale nodded.

The Indian still surveyed the low couch with a stern eye.

"Him—see?—No?"

"No," said Scale.

"Ha!" said the Indian, still gazing at the once strong man.

Blue-grass never spoke for two or three minutes, and then he said: "Him wound—on head."

"Chief Robbs!" said Scale.

"Him rat!" said the Indian. "Him not Chief! Indian hunt him when lazy time come, small game!"

Scale surveyed the Indian, but dare not speak again.

Blue-grass laid some fish on the floor of the cave near the door. Then he came up to the bed and knelt down at Buttress's feet. He touched them gently with his hand several times, and said in a low voice: "No more hunt—no more, Friend Buttress! Yes—him live—him run, walk, leap, climb!"

He got up and came away, Scale making room for him.

"See?" said the Indian. "Blue-grass look in eyes of John D. Scale. Him all right!"

The Indian put his hand up impressively, smiled

suddenly, and went out of the cave into the sunshine.

"Three weeks—and not a word!" said John D. Scale. "Even 'im was a comfort!"

A groan issued from the floor, and then a word, two words, three or four.

Scale heard "father," he heard "gun" and "dog."

He clapped his hands. The Indian had brought good fortune.

CHAPTER LI

LOUIS'S DIARY

IT was five o'clock in the morning, and a beautiful silvery light, the dawn's first herald of the sun, greeted Buttress's opening eyes.

A waft of air further awakened him. He raised himself carefully, and struggled to his feet.

No one was in the cave.

He started, with hesitating, weak steps, to fumble his way to the opening.

It took him five minutes to do it, and when this had been accomplished, he staggered with the vividness of the new day.

The light was intolerable, and Louis reeled.

He did not fall, he balanced himself with great care and precision. He took hold of the jagged wall of limestone crag. Then he looked about him.

He shut his eyes for a few minutes, and when he

opened them again, their blue pupils dilating, he called out with his whole strength.

What was his surprise to find that his tone had degenerated into a gasping, untuneful whisper.

He was weak.

"That's all I am!" cried Louis to himself. "It ain't any use to hunt to-day. Still—Ari-wa-kis will be waiting for me."

"Where am I? I thought I heard Spen's voice."

He gazed before him.

He could see pale willows, now showing yellow leaves among the green of their soft foliage. He could see water. He heard it.

"The lake's rushin'!" said Louis. "Am I mad?"

He sat down outside the door of the cave.

"Silvia!" he said in a whisper.

This word sent him shrinking within himself and he became profoundly thoughtful.

He sat in stupefied silence, while the birds around him gathered their voices together into a morning concert.

"Silvia!" he repeated again in a questioning tone.

Still he gathered no connected story from his mind's long wanderings, until at length, in some vague way, words roamed into his mind: "'Think me out'!" said Louis, softly.

He became lost in thought.

It was one of those days when the country wakes up, under the sun, in such a magnificently generous way, that the first hour of Creation is almost before the vision of an old world. Louis, surveying the white drenching dew lying on everything around him, smelling its moisture on the withered pods of the spider-webbed willows, felt tremulous and full of a strange awe.

He sat an hour outside the cave, and the warmth of the sun did him good. Every second his mind grew clearer, and he looked at the river, glistening between willow leaves, and said:

"Blue-grass, Bill Din—Bill!—and Silvia!"

John D. Scale came up from the bank of the river with a fish he had caught for breakfast.

Buttress put out his hand.

"My friend!" he said.

"Oh—not half," said Scale, but he took Louis's hand in his, and then went swiftly about breakfast.

Buttress watched the fire-lighting with a smile of pleasure, and even put his hands out to catch warmth. When John laid the fish in fat, and they were frizzling, Buttress said: "Everything has a beginning and an end, but there always follows another track. Ain't that so?"

Scale begged him to eat some fish.

"Sure!" said Louis. "I'm an idle beggar. How long have you been huntin' food for me?"

"Three weeks."

"There's a tale behind those three weeks," said Louis sharply.

Scale was terrified at the wise look in the hunter's face.

"You eat, and sit in the sun, and get strong!" he said.

"Sure!" said Louis.

He fell asleep after breakfast, and Scale went

"Silvia!" he repeated again in a questioning tone.

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"You eat, and sit in the sun, and get strong!" he said.

"Sure!" said Louis.

He fell asleep after breakfast, and Scale went

about whistling. The man had a feeling that the hunter was his own property, saved from the wreck of Robbs's salvage.

It was when the sun was at the meridian, and Scale was resting also, that Louis looked at him again, and said:—"Tell me how you done it?"

"The Swede hit you and you was about dead. Then the camp quit the place all in a hurry. I was off with the rest. But it was no use. I'd taken a peculiar liking to you, and I did a bunk in the night, and buzzed back to you."

Buttress relapsed into silence.

Scale thought he was asleep, but looking round, saw Louis smiling at him.

"You ain't any family, have you?" said Scale, jubilantly.

"I'm married," said Buttress.

Scale got up and went sulkily amongst the willows. He came back after a quarter of an hour, but he did not speak any more.

Louis called him in the afternoon.

"Quit your job!" he said.

Scale obeyed instantly.

"Where did you learn to do as you was told?" inquired Buttress in a surprised voice.

"God save me!" cried Scale. "'Tain't respectable to name it!"

"Everything has a beginning and an end!" repeated the hunter.

"God save me!" said Scale fervently. "I thought my life would never end!"

"What have you done?" said Buttress.

"Killed a man," said Scale, awestruck with the truth.

"Saved another," said Buttress, "remember it!"

Scale pulled himself nearer to the hunter.

"'TwASN'T done in coldness, no premeditation, and nothin' of that! I was overswept with feelin's bigger'n me, and I shot a man in the heart. Can you guess why?"

Buttress raised himself with an effort.

"Are you married?" he said.

"A woman married me," said Scale. "I was unprepared for all these mixed-up doings the

world indulges in, with such charnces to do it. My wife and my friend were larfing at me. That awakenin' to see I was their dupe made me the prey of the devil. I didn't give in to him, mind you, but he took hold of me, and ran me. The Judge let me off, easy, sayin' the circumstances were all in favour of having the man shot!"

Buttress became abstracted.

"It's a horrible subject," said Scale, enthusiastically, "I know another tale—'twas a girl what was kept with a lovely mind, all her own, with lovely ideas. She had two blokes lovin' her—one was as fine as they make 'em—the other had made himself master of all there is to learn about women. I notice that this subject of knowing our partners before we woo 'em, is studied by the bad people, while the good people leave it to charnst! The wrong man won the girl, not because he was wrong, but because he knew what he was doing. The other man, right as he was—didn't know how to act to a girl, 'cos he ain't thought about it—see?"

Scale turned to Buttress.

The hunter's eyes were glazed, and for a moment he looked as if he were dead.

"I'll bring you some broth," said Scale.

He went about his work, and when Buttress had taken a drink from the cup he said to Scale: "Tell me about that poor girl!"

"The man's cruelties were nothin' that 'ud hang him—she died of realizing what he was—still, as she lay dead, I was thankful! She lay at peace."

"It shouldn't have happened," said Buttress.
"She should have known the right man."

"There was a bachelor chap once, married a girl, and she didn't tell him she liked petting, he never thought of it hisself—see? That's a funny story for a change! She set the house on fire and burned them both up!"

Buttress took the cup, and poured out the last few drops of soup.

"You're a great laugher!" he said.

"It ain't me, it's the story!" said Scale. "Once, when I was in London, I did up bottles of medicine

for a doctor—do you mind me talkin'?—I've been sayin' nothin' for three weeks."

"If you must do it, go on!" said Buttress.

"The doctor was confidential with me, and he said to me more than a hundred times that of all the family homes into which he entered, only three couples out of the multitude was equal to the ideal! That gives the whole thing in its misery. I made up my mind I'd find a man embittered like me, and live with 'im. We all put up with it, but we don't like to face the fact that marriage is a lottery, 'cept to the wrong people, and they pick out the best without any speculation—same as Delilah did Samson. When do you find a man and woman equally matched? Once in a blue moon!"

Buttress thrust the cup away from him, and tried to place it on the uneven ground. His lips were trembling for speech, but he was too weak to give power to his words.

He signed to Scale to stop talking.

The man went about his odd jobs without any more ado.

Buttress fell asleep again, and did not awake until the next day when he heard the sound of rain beating on leaves and ground.

He could see Scale, whittling a stick in the shadows.

"Come near me!" said Buttress.

Scale ran to him.

"Get a paper and pencil and put down what I say!"

Scale felt in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a stump. He fiddled in another pocket and found some paper.

"Is it a will?" he asked.

"No!" said Buttress in a loud voice.

Scale was silent.

"A few thoughts and I want you to have them," he said. "I'd write it on the walls if I had strength to get it off my mind. I'm going home tomorrow."

"Oh!" said Scale.

The man felt sulky again. If the hunter was going back to his wife, why trouble with him any

more? He half determined to put the pencil in his pocket.

But the hunter was looking earnestly at him.

"First of all," said Buttress, "put down in big letters, and think big while you're a'doin' it—'What does Creation mean?—What does it mean to you, to me, to all the world?'"

Scale was busy for a while, and when he looked up again at Buttress, surprise was the expression on his face.

"What's that look for?" said Buttress.

"Don't know wot I look like," said Scale.

"If I was to sit up and tell you all the ugly tales that have been acted out in the district to which I belong, because of disrespect to God's laws, you'd back them with more—that's what you'd do—you'd back them with more. You ain't surprised at *any* story told about the wrong side of Creation. But if I begin to talk about the right side of Creation—if I begin to praise God for the greatest gift He has given to man, as a human creature, you'd open your eyes!"

"I'm willin' to have 'em opened!" said Scale.

"Then put down as the next thing: 'Why does man forgit to study the foundations of life?'—He'll get more out of that, than out of anything he makes with his brains and hands."

"The wrong people doesn't—so completely does the wrong ones study up the subject, that while there's none that's bitterer than me about these wicked ones that work mischief, and makes tragedies of homes, I sometimes think that I'd have been a happier man—p'raps a better—if I'd been brought up in the midst of them! Known somethin' too, see?"

"Is that it?" said Buttress, "that's the world's disgrace. That's what I'm coming to! Put down—'We're all at work to lift ourselves in the scale of Creation.' We turn our eyes in every direction. There's no road we don't try and get a path through—however rough and cut-up and blocked with difficulties. There's the North and South Pole for examples of man's determination. Ain't it true? We invent, we

scheme, we try experiments. And all the while, we forget God. We forget God most of all in the creation of our children. Now we're not a'goin' to do that—in the future—Scale. We're goin' to think, and know, and remember that to create a soul is God's joy, and He gave to us our lives and power to do it, because He loves to show us a road to the stars. Think, Scale. Forget your own bit o' personal trouble; think of all the little children getting created out of pure love! They'll be gems —those children."

"Poor blessed kids!" said Scale. "It cuts me up to think of babies in the muddle of mistakes."

"Put it down, Scale. What in the name of Creation are we a'doin', that we don't set all our hopes on the realities given us in soul raisin'? On this score man must never send a buildin' thought to Hell, especially about the comin' of the children, especially about the soul that shall match ours. Match is a right word, Scale! To all these things man must give himself, as he would give his heart to God—entirely. For these thoughts he must

kill his body if need be, for in the reverence of the irreverent, we can see the soul unfold its wings."

"My," said Scale sadly. "It do feel good to believe the best side wins out!"

"Sure!" said Buttress. "Give right a chance. I've lived by a lake-side all my days, and thought a lot about nature and I don't know enough about my own race. Still, my beginning was good, and I've got my eyes opened. I'm thinkin' some, these days, thinkin' from the big right side, and I have my finger on the page of knowledge. And I'll have everythin' right—I say those words from the deeps within me—I'll have everythin' right, as in the beginnin', in that beautiful Garden of Eden, where there was no need of knowledge. And now we've got to despise that tree once again—that's our serpent, still keepin' us out of Paradise—we've got to sense God bigger'n the fools of men who think that tree is wisdom, and a hand bigger than the fools of women, who think innocence better'n truth—that's woman's way of despisin'

God's laws! The world must eat of the tree that tells 'em that the laws of God are perfect."

Scale gazed at Buttress.

"He believes in hisself," thought the learner, "I call it a treat to know that wrong doin' ain't worth considerin'—I'll begin from the beginning."

There was a rustling of leaves near by and in another minute two figures blocked the light from without, and one tall straight form bent to find a way within, to the hunter's side.

"Bill!" cried Buttress in a glad voice.

Bill ran to his friend and knelt down, and took both his hands, and wrung them again and again. Buttress, feeling weak, let the tears drop down his thin cheeks. They shook hands but remained in silence. The Indian was for a second motionless in the doorway, then he disappeared from sight. Scale crept into a dark corner of the cave.

CHAPTER LII

SHERIDAN'S FAITH

MRS. BUTT stayed all night with Silvia, promising an early start in the morning, but when the daylight arrived the girl was in a fever, now raving about the woods, and now talking with sense and calmness.

"It ain't anythin' but tiredness," she said. "I'll be better in an hour or two, and then we'll start. Tell Spen to wait until I feel strong."

Mrs. Butt asked Spen to go for the doctor. The man rushed off full speed, leaving the buggy and one horse at Ari-wa-kis.

When he returned he found Mrs. Butt still very anxious.

"I think it is low fever," she said, "for she is different every few minutes. Can you go for Mrs. Eden?"

Spen did as he was told, and Mrs. Butt returned to Silvia's room.

"Is Spen still waiting?" said the girl.

"He is ready when you are," said Mrs. Butt.

"We'll go directly," said Silvia, throwing herself back on the pillows, and falling into a broken sleep. She awaked suddenly, crying out in a voice of distress.

"What is wrong, Silvia?" asked Mrs. Butt.

"See," said the girl, "he lies dead—alas!—that so many mistakes have been made!"

"He is better," said Anne, words rising from she knew not where; "better, and coming home."

"Coming home," said Silvia, falling asleep again.

The awakening was to be so cruel and full of alarm, that Anne sat close by the girl, ready to smile reassuringly should she start up. She was often thrilled with horror, as though she saw Louis in distress. This went on until the doctor came, with a doctor's advice.

"She must on no account be moved—the best

thing, of course, is to produce her husband. Is there no more news?"

"Mr. Din has gone in search of him," said Anne.

"A better man could not have gone," said the doctor. "It is well you are here, Mrs. Butt. I'll get Mrs. Eden to bring over suitable medicines." And he went away.

So Anne sat down to an accustomed task. Life had often brought to her this long routine of a day given up to some poor restless being, with a world shut out like a curtain down—only the dusk at nightfall to tell of the change from daylight to lamplight.

It was dusk now, and for a few moments Silvia's sleep seemed natural. Mrs. Butt slipped out of the room to meet Mrs. Eden.

"Poor thing!" said the farmer's wife. "I've brought every sort of thing that might be useful. I've a buggy full outside. That's an air cushion belongin' to our poor Peter who died of a brain fever. I hope it ain't the brain—I despair when it's the brain. And there's the doctor's medicine,

if she's excitable. But don't you use it, Mrs. Butt, unless you're obliged—it'll be deadening stuff, and it'll make her worse in the end. Oh, and there's someone gone over to the junction in case there's news from Mr. Din. And if there is, they'll be back with it in the morning. That's what's wanted, not morphine."

Anne took the bottles and the parcels, helping Mrs. Eden to get them from the buggy.

Mrs. Eden drove away again.

It was a quiet autumn evening, not even a whisper of a breeze stirred the foliage, which in its heaviness, darkness, and silence seemed like part of a great and solemn picture.

Anne, looking around the yard, seeing the glimmer of water like light, rather than the surface of the lake, was thinking about many things. Bill's face was present to her mind.

She was returning to the house when she heard the gate open and shut. She could not see any one, but she heard steps. She walked to the kitchen door and pushed it wider open, as a help to the new-

comer. He came to the door and remained there.

"Mrs. Butt."

"Come in, Mr. Sheridan."

"Is she better?"

"About the same."

There was silence for a while and Sheridan began again.

"Mrs. Butt, I'm going away. I'm—I'm—changed. Is she seriously ill?"

"If her husband were to return she would be well soon, Mr. Sheridan. Her constitution is splendid, but she has had a hard life. If you are going away, take my best wishes with you. I know you'll do well."

She was silent again. Sheridan also.

She walked away, and she heard him go out of the gate.

Somehow she felt inclined to weep, as though sorrow was heaped upon sorrow, but she had Silvia to think of, and she went quickly into the house.

Sheridan, outside the gates of Ari-wa-kis, seeing the beauty of the evening, breathed his first prayer.

CHAPTER LIII

PARADISE

SILVIA was better the third morning, and told Anne that she would get up and go down stairs.

A shower had fallen about daybreak, setting the lake to dancing with the drops that dazzled its surface, but it had been swept away with a south wind. The day had grown calm, and the red-leaved maple tree, having scattered the heavy drops, grew motionless again, only its boughs were more easily seen, for the leaves strewed the porch.

Silvia was shaken with the fever, pale and thin, but once more herself; so Anne threw open the windows in the big sitting-room, dusted the desk once belonging to Silvester Lake, and prepared the place for habitation. It took the sunny side of

the house. She did the work very slowly, for often the enticing view of the lake, the sheeny moving light, attracted her to the big windows.

She was startled to see Silvia in the doorway.

"Already," said Anne.

Silvia came farther into the room, looking at her father's desk.

"I ain't been here since I left home," she said.

"Have you heard any news?"

"No one has been over yet—I'm expecting them any time."

"Mrs. Butt, I feel kinder restless—I wish they'd come from Alamanca!"

"I hear someone now!" said Anne.

She went out into the kitchen, and ran to the door, Silvia following her. She saw that the yard gate was wide open, that Bill Din was standing by the horse's head, holding the impatient Gin-fly, while Louis Buttress was within the yard.

Anne went out to meet the hunter. Silvia stood under the tree, waiting for him.

"Mr. Buttress," said Mrs. Butt, "your wife has

been ill, but she is better now that she sees you."

Anne went forward to meet Bill and the hunter came up to the porch, and stopped under the fiery maple to meet his wife. They were facing one another and not a word was spoken by either of them.

They could hear Bill and Anne talking eagerly, but the silence that bound their own hearts could not be broken.

Presently a leaf fell on to Silvia's hair and Louis took it off with a trembling hand, and with Silvia gripping his right hand they went into the sitting-room together.

Buttress shut the door.

Silvia began to cry and this gave Louis his voice again.

"Silvia," he said, "I've broken the spell and come to you; but then I've been near death so that made it obedient to the words in your letter."

"I wanted you to come, Louis," said Silvia.
"I was tired of my own word."

"I've thought it all out, while I lay ill, Silvia,

and I ask you to forgive me for bein' so hard and misunderstandin'. If you was true to the best that was within you, tellin' you to trust to men, and if, in the doin' of it, you made your mistakes—who was I to judge you when you was tryin' your best to get to the straight side of things? I was no fit judge, and I had a lot to think of as I lay there in the darkness after I came to. Yet I judged you from my feelin's as a man, knowin' nothin' of what you, as a woman, had gone through. May be, Silvia, 'taint exactly men's fault that so little's known of what women come through—'tain't yours, neither—'tis certain sure you was the woman for me, doing your best to tell me. My belief in you is perfect. That's true, Silvia. God knows we're human and faulty, but you've won my belief out of the troubles you've come through to get to me. I'll not speak of what you are to me for yourself."

"Louis, come to the windows, where we can see Ari-wa-kis."

Silvia looked into Louis's face, and saw how deeply the illness had entered into his physical

life, and she saw the grey hairs about the temple, where the blow had fallen from the hands of the merciless enemy.

"Louis," she said, "we're speakin' to each other from our inmost souls. When I was a bit of a kid playin' about the land, with nothin' but my daddy to talk to, and sometimes you to watch—you—with your wanderin' ways across the lake—I was happy as the day was long! I learned lots of good things out of the silence and the land, and nothin' I heard hurt me. And then I began to have some thoughts to myself, as each year I grew. I seen the spring bring the lambs and the calves—then I seen chickens and children and I sure got some lovely thoughts. I said to my dad once, "God gives little kids to everythin' that's grown-up. I bet it's to keep them out of mischief—and good and busy." And my dear old daddy he said to me, "That's real good sense, Silvia, and the truth from one side." I was pleased when he said it; I felt I was growin' up, and gittin' clever and wise! I said it to someone else one day, and they kinder

sniggered—it maddened me—'twas the first time in my life I seen the world with a shade on it. I stopped playin' and I cried a bit, and wondered more. Then a beautiful voice within me said, very quiet and low like I was in church, “ ‘Tain’t God’s way!’ ” So I set to work to think more to myself, and I got happy again, and settled it was just lovely to consider that God made man and woman to be together, and they, if they were good, could have the glory of children. Then there was a day when that idea got broken up and I said to myself, “ I ain’t a goin’ to ask these mean grown-up people that snigger. I’ll die unknownin’ before I’ll do it.” So there I grew up without knowin’ the things I ought to know. Do you blame me, Louis? Would you like to get God’s laws told to you, by the people who had no pride in them? I never asked anythin’ again. I’d had enough. I felt I’d rather die of mistakes than learn it their way.”

“ I’m with you, Silvia.”

“ I knew it when I was a kid on the other bank

of Ari-wa-kis. You gave me peace when I looked at you, even after I started to make mistakes. It got to be a prayer with me, to hold to this feelin' of beauty about why we was made different from each other and how it was our part of God. I can't tell you how it came to be a prayer, but it grew out of the silence, and I wanted to make sure that the deep, deep voice was the real one! So I was a'watchin' for a man, watchin' with my soul dependin' on it, instead of believin' and waitin' on God to show me! That's how I started goin' with the boys. Yet there was no fire in them, no love of God's works. I wanted the man whose soul would rage when God's laws were mocked in either word or action. Creation ain't a crumpled leaf turned down, to be hidden and despised! I wanted the man who thought it was a perfect law, because it was the law that created the best thing on earth—souls. And then, Louis, out of the silence of Ari-wa-kis, North Bank spoke to South Bank! You were close by all the time. You were there, feelin' it perfect!"

"It was God, Silvia."

"Don't I know it! *You* was my answer."

"Silvia, paradise, ain't it?"

They put their arms about each other, with
kisses of love, that were full of life and joy.

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By

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